



JOHN BARR (c1873-1949)

One of Sydney's leading architects specialising in Gothic Revival buildings in the early 20th Century, English-born John Barr, after graduating from Brisbane Grammar School, trained for four years as an articled student of G.H.M. Addison, the first true high-Victorian architect to practise in Brisbane. Barr then entered the office of the prolific architect John Kirkpatrick, in Sydney, and was subsequently appointed to the New South Wales Government Architect's Department in the 1890s. He spent a year travelling in England and the Continent, and re-entered the Department in Sydney on his return. While there, he was assigned to prepare a design for Sydney Central Station. His design had a French Renaissance character, but Gorrie McLeish Blair's Academic Classical design was preferred in 1900. Barr entered a competition for the design of a new GPO in Brisbane in 1900 and was awarded first prize, but his Federation Free Classical design, complete with clock tower was, sadly, not built. Barr worked under the Government Architect W.L.Vernon and his assistant George McRea on the elaborate Federation Gothic Fisher Library (1902-9) modelled on English collegiate buildings, and the similarly styled Medical School additions, both at the University of Sydney.

Between 1904 and 1907 Barr superintended the construction of the Federation Gothic St Carthage's Cathedral, Lismore, designed by Herbert Wardell, which is one of Australia's finest Catholic cathedrals. In 1912, under George McRae, Barr undertook the detailed design of the School of Agriculture at Sydney University, which was completed in 1916 in the Federation Arts and Crafts style. Barr resigned in 1919 to commence private practice.

When one of Barr's first clients, Charles Hoskins wished to build a church in Lithgow as a memorial to his children, Barr produced an Inter-War Gothic design in 1919 for the Hoskins Memorial Presbyterian Church, which was opened in 1928 to much acclaim locally. Barr was also the architect for the 12-storey Kembla Building, completed in 1925 in George Street, Sydney for the Hoskins family's iron and steel company. When former pupils of, and donors to, Brisbane Boys' Grammar School were invited to compete to design its War Memorial Library, he submitted an octagonal Inter-War Gothic design in 1920. It won the competition and the building proceeded to completion in 1924.

Already an Associate of the RIBA, Barr was made a Fellow of the Institute of Architects of New South Wales in 1921. For some time he had exhibited drawings in the Institute's exhibitions, one in 1913 being of his remarkable project to transform Fort Denison. He revived it for the 1920 exhibition, by then as a war memorial, in the form of a ship, strangely with a dominant Stripped Classical tower crowned by a cupola, but nothing came of his idea. Barr's drawing ability contributed to his success in competitions, and in November 1921 he delivered a lecture to the Institute on "Competitions - for Young and Old". Three weeks later, his success in the competition to design a war memorial hall at Melbourne Grammar School, which attracted 56 entries, was announced. The Old Melburnians War Memorial Hall was completed in 1928, but not to Barr's design.

Then came Barr's greatest achievement. In 1925 he was awarded first prize in a competition open to all Australian architects for the addition of three spires to famed British architect William Butterfield's incomplete St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne (1880-91). Barr designed a central tower and spire rising to 314 feet and two lower spires on extensions to the west towers, all appropriate to Butterfield's sophisticated high-Victorian design. Barr became the cathedral architect, lectured at the Cathedral in 1926 on "The Greatness of Gothic" and the project was completed in 1933. When he was a guest of honour at a dinner in the Chapter House, the Archbishop spoke of "the genius of Mr Barr...in conceiving the design of the spires". Conservation work on St Paul's Cathedral received the 2009 AIA national Lachlan Macquarie Award, and the jury report included praise for Barr's "thoughtfully resolved twentieth-century sandstone spires".

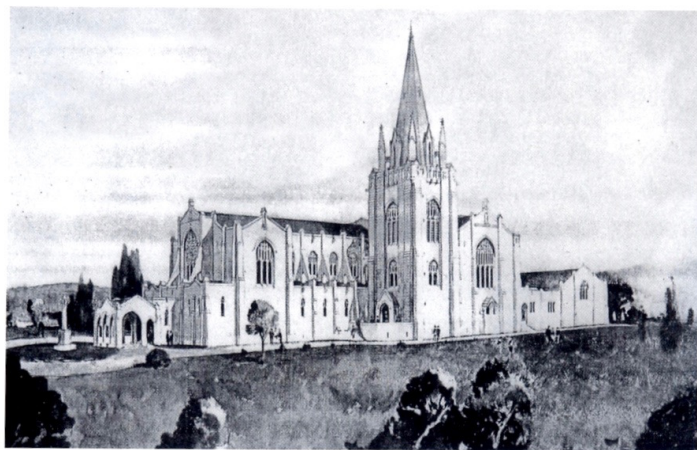
Barr and the Melbourne architect Henry Hardie Kemp (an assessor of the St Paul's competition) were appointed in 1927 as architects to collaborate in the building of the Presbyterian Church of St Andrew, hall and manse in Canberra. Kemp designed the manse, completed in 1928, and Barr the 1929 caretaker's cottage, but the hall came later, by others. By 1929, when the church's foundation stone was laid, Barr had designed an ornate Inter-War Gothic style church with a layout appropriate to Presbyterian worship. He also designed the furniture and fittings. His plan included a Warriors' Chapel in the north-east transept, opposite the choir. The stone-faced church was virtually completed in 1932 which, after it had been furnished, opened in 1934 with an "already familiar" landmark tower and spire but, due to a lack of funds, without a nave. In 1979 a modern fully-glazed Peace Memorial Nave replaced the 1932 temporary timber wall.

During the 1930s Barr designed residences and public buildings, one being the council chambers at Windsor, NSW, "a modern and roomy structure of the Georgian type" completed in 1934. In 1935 Barr and his wife Caroline sailed for England. By 1936 they had returned and were living at Palm Beach. They later moved to Springwood, where Caroline died in 1948 and John a year later.

References: Photo of John Barr from *The Argus*, 4 May 1933
 ‘GPO Designs. Awards...’ *The Week* (Brisbane) 24 August 1900, p.3 (Barr’s education and training)
 R McKillop, D Ellsmore and J Oakes, *A Century of Central: Sydney’s Central Station 1906 to 2006* (Sydney: Australian Railway Historical Society, 2008), 23–24
 ‘First Premiated Design for Brisbane Post Office, by John Barr’ *The Queenslander* (Brisbane) 8 Sept 1900, p.542
 Robert A. Dallen *The University of Sydney Its History and Progress Illustrated* A & R 1914, pp.26-34
sydneyarchitecture.com/UNI/UNI-013.htm (Sydney University School of Agriculture R.D. Watt Building)
 ‘Pioneer’s Grandson Gains Degree’ *Northern Star* (Lismore) 11 May 1950 p.8 (St Carthage’s Cathedral)
 Apperly et al *Identifying Australian Architecture* A & R, 1989 p.122 (Fisher Library) p.123 (St Carthage)
 ‘A Gift Church’ *Tweed Daily* (Murwillumbah) 3 October 1919, p.2
 ‘Hoskins Memorial Church A Beautiful Structure’ *Lithgow Mercury*, 19 November 1928, p.4
 ‘New City Offices’ *The Sydney Morning Herald* 12 November 1924, p.8 (Kembla Building)
 ‘Grammar School Memorial Library’ *The Telegraph* (Brisbane) 20 November 1920, p.9 (also Fisher Library)
 ‘A Sydney Architect’s Proposal For A War Memorial on Fort Denison’ *Sydney Mail* 17 March 1920, p.11
 ‘Melbourne Memorial. Sydney Architect’s Design’ *The Sydney Morning Herald* 29 November 1921, p.9
 ‘Completion of St Paul’s Cathedral Prize-Winning Designs’ *The Argus* 11 February 1925, p.31
 ‘The Greatness of Gothic’ *Advocate* 25 March 1926, p.23
 ‘Dinner in Chapter House’ *The Argus* 4 May 1933, p.7 (On completion of St Paul’s Cathedral with photo of John Barr)
falkinger.com.au/awards.htm ‘National and State Awards’, (Restoration of St Paul’s Cathedral)
 ‘Presbyterian Church for Canberra’ *The Argus* 21 May 1927 p.16 (Appointment of architects)
 ‘New Presbyterian Church, Canberra’ *The Sydney Morning Herald* 6 July 1934, p.15
 Ross F. Rowe and Alison I. Aitken ‘The Building and Furnishing of The Presbyterian Church of St Andrew Canberra ACT’ 1992.
 Ken Charlton *Federal Capital Architecture Canberra 1911-1939* National Trust of Australia (ACT) 1984, p.54
 ‘New Council Chambers Plans...’ *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 23 February 1934, p.6
 ‘New Council Chambers Officially Opened...’ *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 19 October 1934, p.3
 Obituary of John Barr *Nepean Times* 14 April 1949, p.8



Presbyterian Church of St Andrew, Canberra.
 Photo: Ken Charlton.



John Barr’s design drawing of the church.
 Original held by the church.