Editorial

Our first issue to be devoted to ecclesiatical architecture and its architects is part of a national re-awakening of interest in our churches, especially those from last century.

William Butterfield and William Wilkinson Wardell have always been regarded as eminent Victorians in both senses of the word, but probably never more so than today.

Our interest is increasing in men such as these, their art and the faith of our grandparents which made it all possible. At the same time and rate, our interest is lessening in the function of these structures and the spiritual forces which produced them. Between the censuses of 1966 and 1971 the number of Australians affirming that they had no religion rose from 28,000 to more than 256,000.

Today even churches from the 1940s and 1950s are being brought forward for official recognition and protection (often from their pragmatic owners). Yet notwithstanding this well-documented affection for our recent past, the nineteenth-century church, Gothic-styled in basalt or bluegum, is the prototypical Australian church for most laymen and many professionals. It is seen as a splendid union of an earlier generation's spiritual aspirations and that generation's formidable talents in design and construction.

As examples of this revival: in October there will be an exhibition of Gothic Revival churches of South Australia at Flinders University, and in November a symposium at Melbourne University will cover two aspects of church design particularly appropriate to an age which, while neither building nor understanding churches, nevertheless greatly admires them.

The first objective of the Melbourne symposium is 'to develop a policy for the preservation of church buildings, and the theological and philosophical justification for this development'. The second objective is 'to discuss what has occurred overseas in the field of church preservation'.

This continuing reliance on overseas talent is particularly apposite in Melbourne. It is now a century since our two great Gothic Revival cathedrals were designed by the aforementioned English architects, Butterfield and Wardell, one of whom managed to carry out his commission without leaving his London office.