Our Lady of Mt. Carmel,
Richardson St., Middle Park
Architect: A.A. Fritsch
1912-27
During July of 1980, select members of the Council for the Historic Environment toured a number of churches, each selected as being representative of the Byzantine influence, or that of the Italian Romanesque or Renaissance.

Byzantium may well have been recalled when we confronted the Ukranian Cathedral Church of S. Peter and S. Paul at North Melbourne, (1962-3). Set high on a hill, the building's unusual form may be seen clearly from any point of the compass. For many, it has been an exotic citadel observed when circum-navigating the city, and others, an early example of a perceptable wave of ethnic christian churches which arose in the 1960's.

Martyria, the shrine of martyrs, was the plan-form adopted here. A stilted dome has been placed over the centre of a Greek Cross; three of its arms creating lines for tripartite wagon-vaulting which sheds heavenly light on the transcept and narthex, by virtue of glazing rising to the top of each arched vault.

The Cathedral of St. Demetrius, Vladimir, (1194-98), illustrates the national prototypes from which this design appears to have come. It has a facade composed almost entirely of tall stilted arches, topped by a central, elevated dome.

Here too, is some precedent for the motifs used in the decorative screen work below each window.

In North Melbourne Architects, Smith and Tracey cite Ukranian traditional embroidery as the source of these. At St. Demetrius it was the Orient which inspired the bas-relief which filled each wall face. Other architects of the 1950-60's have designed similar motifs, often from grey concrete masonry, and always in allegiance to the Japanese influence. For example, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Heidelberg Road, Fairfield uses a Greek Cross pattern for a grey concrete screen across the building's face.

Like St. Demetrius, the overall outward appearances of S. Peter and S. Paul is that of a monolithic surface - reinforced concrete, in this case and stucco in the original. The addition of windows, immediately under each arch and the cantilevering roof to the porch-recess, however, totally separates the cladding from the tall arched structure in contrast to the Medieval church, where walls and structure are wedded. Here then is the interpretation filtered through 700 years of time, and successfully providing a building with a definite 1960's flavour, despite its centuries old form.
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Other similarly Byzantine inspired churches, include the Presbyterian Church, Canterbury Road, Canterbury, (1927), the Methodist Church, Mildura, (1912), and the Roman Catholic Church, Burke Road, Camberwell. All of these buildings were erected in this century and exemplify a latter phase of the transition of styles suitable for ecclesiastical architecture. From the early Regency churches, through to the Gothic Revival, followed the adoption of the Italian, Romanesque and Renaissance.

Perhaps it is strange that a further Byzantine influenced church should have been constructed by The Christian Science Movement on the St. Kilda Road. Although in detail, and from viewing the main elevation, the building appears to be more so the Greek Revival, rather than Byzantine, the dome, plan and minor elevations have the form of Byzantium.

S. Irene, Constantinople, (527- ) has a similar broad-arched framework containing a number of minor lights, just as the First Church reveals along its norther elevation. There is also the dome at the crossing, and indeed the Greek Cross plan.

Sir Osborn McCutcheon revealed to us that it was Harold Dumsday who designed this church, in 1920 within the office of Bates, Peebles and Smart. It is said that Dumsday, a Britisher, followed the contemporary English architectural themes closely. He admired both Robert Atkinson and Edwin Lutyens, the latter having established his reputation in free use of the Classical Revival, during his middle period.
Hence we have the colonaded doric portico, flanked by lesser wings; each being pierced with an elliptical window. Behind the main pediment rises a stepped parapet, echoing the gable and is itself underscored by a dentillated cornice and architrave.

The Greek flavour intensifies once inside the narthex. Tuscan order transverse trabeation, pilasters and columns divide the space into regular bays where terrazzo, patterned with Greek crosses, is contained within checked borders of vitrified mosaic.

The atmosphere both within the narthex and the church itself it typically monochrome. Majorly buff coloured walls, ceilings and floors create the sea within which the laquered hardwood architraves and doors, the grey marble stair lining and the bronzed metal work are the dark rocky outcrops.

Inside the main chamber, all is air and light. Elliptical lights in the drum of the dome are aided by the tall, arched fenestration, set in the minor bays, whilst the roof spans seem infinitely long and there are no columns or arcades to block the light. The modern facility of reinforced concrete supports the dome and pendentives are unnecessary.

The wall and ceiling surfaces, like the narthex, are majorly undecorated save for sparse panelling and occasional pilaster. Decoration, in keeping with the severity of the Neo Grec and Modern Times, is minimized and, where it occurs, is two dimensional. Sparingly applied, but meaningless consoles, launch concrete beams from a columnless wall surface, and overlarge festoons provide the only fanciful decoration from their position below the dome.
The pendant electroliers, hung at intervals around the dome perimeter appear to be original as do the oyster fittings which light the aisles and the quaint shell-shaped brackets which are placed around the drum of the dome to illuminate the spandrels, betwixt the oculi. Alterations are visible, however, within the apse, where the installation of an organ inspired a large cast-plaster screen. It has a golden metallic finish whilst the pattern is overtly Byzantine in character and represents the only richly decorated surface within the church.

Beyond the church is the Sunday School, where slender steel columns support Greek pattern, cruciform brackets which in their turn take the roof beams. This is a most elegantly detailed room.
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The Middle Park Camelite Church, (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel), was our introduction to Mr. Augustus Andrew Fritsch, (1866-1933), and the Romanesque.

Here the facade presents a stepped gable, with flanking towers, each topped by a cupola. Placed behind the gable-apex, is a small copper-clad dome, stilted on a tall buttressed drum: this is the bell tower. 'The deeply recessed and arched main entrance is to be set on red granite columns, with a tympanum in opus-sectile work, above the doorway. This will be divided into three panels with the central panel featuring the Virgin and Child, and the smaller panels, the fishes and the eucharistic symbols of bread and wine.'

The plan has no aisles and the nave stands tall with plaster 'barrel-vaulting', after the manner of the Romanesque of Northern Europe. The picturesque disposition of masses reinforces this northern character whilst the Muslim stripes, the marble-lined apse and external red brickwork are contributed from Southern Europe.

The Eastern section of the nave, the choir and narthex were added in 1927, together with the gabled porch and baptistry on the northern facade. As promised by The Advocate of 1927, rich marble mosaic was applied to the baptistry floor and the apse walls, to impost height, and although this is a traditional device, the effect is somewhat overpowering. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel appears in frescoe on the apse ceiling. Here she glides midst angels and externally her icon stands aloft, upon the central dome, as the pinnacle of this overtly vertical composition.

This church was originally named the "Prior Kindelan Memorial Church" The Prior had been deceased since 1926, its reopening was to concur with the first anniversary of his death. Hence, to the west of the church there is a priory which, together with the Carmelite Hall on Wright Street, was also a Fritsch design. The priory echoes the gabled facade of the church but with additional Gothic points to its window heads, and 'modern' rendered spandrels separating the windows of each floor as they rise in vertical strips.

The deep verandahs, with their curved, shingled balustrading, no doubt were directed to shelter the Carmelites from the harsh Colonial sun and hence, add the Australian touch to an otherwise adapted eclectic design.

The Hall, built in 1918-19, possesses twin Flemish gables, each with a clover decorating its apex-capping. The German Renaissance appears to have inspired the curve of the central bay parapet and the combination of the three bays has almost an Art Nouveau rhythm to its outline. A tulip plant, forged in cement, drips down from the cappings on each flank of the facade.

Augustus Fritsch perpetrated a style which he adopted almost exclusively in his designs of Roman Catholic architecture, from 1900 until his death. A.A. Fritsch and the Catholic Style, of these two generations, are almost synonymous. Red brick and Romanesque for churches and adapted Tudorbethan for residential or buildings of instruction, became his trademarks.
Logically, we advanced from the Romanesque to the Renaissance. Sacred Heart Church at St. Kilda West, (1884), was probably the first church to be built in Victoria using the style of the Italian Renaissance.

Precedents such as Fontana Paola, Rome, (1612), S. Sussana, Rome, (1597-) and S. Giorgio Dei Greci, Venice, (1538-), had all been created over 300 years prior to Sacred Heart.

'Sacred Heart' barely conceals its Romanesque nave and buttressing side-aisle construction along its minor elevations, but the full Baroque expression is given vent on its eastern face. A layered succession of piers, supporting cornices, hold aloft a central pediment with niche. Oversize modillions buttress each successive storey and conventional buttresses take the thrust of each bay of the facade to the earth. Blind oculi punctuate the flanking bays, whilst a wheel-window marks the facade's centre, and a porch, supported by Tuscan order columns and piers, provides the necessary emphasis to the central doorway of the triology.

Inside, true to The Advocate's contemporary description, (1884), there is a wagon-headed ceiling with plaster pendentes and lunette windows, placed between, to create a clerestory above the aisle arcading. This was the basic fabric of the building which housed a make-shift altar in 1884, when the church was opened on December 7th.

'The roof was lined in the form of an arc of a circle, a style which is known to greatly contribute to the good acoustic properties of buildings ....'3, they wrote.

The church was blessed with 'sun lights' placed in the roof which lit the interior for evening services and a 'a large and beautiful oil painting of the Sacred Heart was hung from the altar ...'

As well, they had built a ... 'rather tall, square bell tower', to the western side of the church.

Nave, Sacred Heart Church
Grey St., St Kilda
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It was hip-roofed with projecting eaves, not unlike the early campanila at S. Ambrogio, Milan, (10th C), and at S. Como, Abbondio, (c1063- ). This tower was demolished in 1927 when W. Patrick Connolly became the architect for the completion of the church. He built another campanile at the north-west corner of the church, styled on this occasion in a way more akin to the German Baroque with its ox-bow parapet and copper cupola, (refer to St. Michael, Berg-am-Laim, 1738). Photographs of the interior, after this fairly sympathetic addition, show the altar, as yet unpainted, and the ceiling and walls bereft of the soft-coloured stencilling and fading gold-leaf we see there today. A massive mannerist-styled organ loft was probably also added during these additions.

W. P. Connolly also designed the most recent addition to the St. John complex, Victoria Parade, East Melbourne, (1929), and was assisted by G. W. Vanheems in the addition of the spires to St. Patrick's, East Melbourne, (1937-7). Connolly, Payne and Dale designed the Newman College Chapel, Melbourne University, (1937), to fill the gap left by W.B. Griffin. Fittingly Connolly had been raised and trained in Dublin, prior to coming to Victoria in 1890 and joined the Institute of Architects during 1892.
Sacred Heart Church
Carlton
Original Design
(Annals of the Catholic Church)

Perhaps the most decorated and impressive interior of the five churches lay at Rathdowne Street within another Sacred Heart Church. It was designed by the same architectural firm although on this occasion under the style of Reed Smart and Tappin, and commenced 13 years after the St. Kilda Sacred Heart. The Advocate apologised for the recurrence of this novel style. 'Classical' ... 'but this would only present a pleasing variety'.

The church is part of a complex begun in 1855 with the laying of the St. Georges Church-School foundation stone. Another school followed in 1883-4 freeing the old stone building for church duty, for which purpose it was renovated. To house the incumbent priest, Fr. O'Connell, the presbytery which stands to the north of the church was completed in 1883. To expand what had become a successful school under the Sisters of Charity, the present church was constructed during 1897 to allow the 1885 building to revert to its original use, that of a school.

It is no accident, given the common architects, that elements already seen at St. Kilda West, repeat at Carlton. Cast in the Italian Baroque manner the church resembles buildings such as St. Agnese, Rome, (1652- ), St. Sebastiano-fuori-le-mura, Rome, (1608- ) and St. Maria at Garigano, (1552- ). With St. Kilda it shares the aisled plan, flanking sacristies, and the oculi clerestory.

In addition it was designed to possess pedimented transepts and a fine, stilted dome at the crossing. These have not been carried out but the elevated Corinthian order colonade, to the eastern facade, has. Twin towers flank the entrance, each with a cupola but, sadly, where the original design was not completed, the remaining empty spaces have been filled by crudely designed ancillary buildings.
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General References:


(c) - The Advocate, (periodical)

(d) - Some of the Fruits of Fifty years - Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria.

Illustrations used from References (a), (b) and (d).

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