Quoting Ian Ferrier (1928-2000)
Contributing to Queensland’s Post-war Modern Church Architecture

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Abstract
Post-war church buildings are often among the most interesting modern architectural works. However, limited recognition has hitherto been afforded to Queensland’s post-war churches and their architects. Located in the (sub)tropical north-eastern corner of the country, the post-war churches in this state share an affinity with their European and North American predecessors, whilst at the same time expressing a clear need to respond to the local, hot and humid climate. This paper researches how Ian Ferrier, a Brisbane-based architect, who designed approximately thirty ecclesiastical buildings from Tweed Heads to Port Moresby between the 1950s and the 1980s struck a balance between international influences and regional responses in his religious designs. In a 1999 interview conducted by local architectural historians Fiona Gardiner and Alice Hampson, Ferrier stated: ‘there is little churches of mine fluttering everywhere’. This statement appears excessively modest. Ferrier was one of the most prominent and most progressive Catholic Church architects in post-war Queensland who fully seized the opportunities that the liturgical movement and the Second Vatican Council afforded to rethink ecclesiastical design. Strangely enough, later in the interview, hequite boastfully claimed: ‘I pride myself in, I was one of the very first to recognise the climate in Queensland, particularly North Queensland, as different from the climate in England’. The son of a Scottish father and a French mother, Ferrier studied architecture in Canada and only moved to Queensland in 1955, at the age of 26.Ferrier’s background and his own appraisal of his architectural work explain the unique blending of the international and the local recognisable in his church designs. Through literature review, archival research, site-visits, interviews with privileged witnesses and (importantly!) the 1999 interview, this paper seeks to position Ferrier’s ecclesiastical designs in relation to his international background and influences, while examining how his buildings addressed the local Queensland climate.
Introduction

Alexander Ian Ferrier (1928–2000), a Brisbane-based architect, designed approximately thirty ecclesiastical buildings across Queensland in the latter half of the twentieth century. In a 1999 interview, Ferrier’s recollections of these architectural works comes across as excessively modest, understating the inventive collection of ecclesiastical designs that he produced, including the (now) heritage listed St Monica’s Cathedral in Cairns. Counterbalancing these self-effacing statements, Ferrier, in the interview, also made some quite boastful claims about his work being at the vanguard of climatological design in Queensland. How can we, as architectural historians, reconcile these two extremes (either overly reticent or overly grandiose) statements? Through critical history research, this paper analyses Ferrier’s modern church buildings in light of his 1999 words. It seeks to position the importance of Ferrier’s designs for Queensland’s post-war modern church architecture, while interrogating how he balanced different interests: liturgical renewal, international influences and responsiveness to local climate.

Creating the Well-Connected and Internationally Aware Architect

Born 5 September 1928 in New York (USA), Ferrier was the fourth child of his Scottish father and French mother. Ferrier’s older brother, Ilay, told of the two boys’ experiences – born close they were inseparable as children – and recorded their three childhood existences in his book. Their early childhood was in Indochina, where they were cared for by a Cantonese nanny. When his father’s work afforded it, trips were undertaken to visit family in France, Scotland and England. Their second existence was in England, where the boys attended boarding school at Ladycross in Seaford, one of the top Catholic boys boarding schools (Ferrier then 9 years old). However, after WWII broke out, they were sent to live with their father’s cousin, in Ottawa (Canada), their third existence. Both boys completed their High Schooling at St Patrick’s Catholic College. Growing up speaking three languages, and experiencing the cities, family life and cultures of various eastern and western countries during the turbulent times surrounding WWII, arguably, gave Ferrier a unique internationalist outlook. Ilay’s writing also narrates the brothers’ strong ties to and friendships within the Catholic Church – a network that Ferrier strengthened and leveraged off during his architectural career.

Between 1946 and 1952 Ferrier studied architecture at McGill University in Canada. Reminiscing on his architectural education in the 1999 interview, he states:

I chose architecture I think because I liked drawing and I liked general knowledge … I had absolutely no connection with anyone in architecture that I can recall … but it didn’t take long for me to realise when I started to study architecture that it was the right choice … the big names Gropius, and Breuer, and Mies … that’s when the excitement started to come in … and the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

In the interview, Ferrier also points out that the course was ‘totally influenced by the modern movement … the most recent work of the Bauhaus period, of those that had gone to the States from the Bauhaus’ and described his lecturers as ‘excellent’.

While at McGill, Ferrier met Mercia Forde, the daughter of the Australian High Commissioner Francis Michael Forde. Ferrier married Mercia in 1951 in Canada. A June 1953 holiday to Australia led to them staying. Ferrier initially worked for the Sydney office of Stevenson and Turner. In the summer of 1955, they followed Mercia’s parents to Queensland. Ferrier took a job in Jack Donoghue’s office, and it was there that he worked on his first ecclesiastical building: the Darwin Cathedral.

In 1957, prior to the completion of the Darwin Cathedral, Ferrier started his own practice. He also took on the volunteer role of Chairman of the St Lucia Catholic Church building committee, the local parish he attended. This committee oversaw the design, funding and construction of the new St Thomas Aquas AMDC Memorial Catholic Church (opened 1960, Hennessy and Hennessy...
It was an advantageous role to take on concurrent with designing, documenting and overseeing the construction of his own practice’s first chapel and church buildings.

Ferrier described himself as ‘always’ reading and named Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra as his hero architects. He travelled overseas in 1953, 1964 and 1968, and, utilising his knowledge of architecture and church design gained from various publications, thoroughly planned which buildings to see ahead of departure. During his 1964 trip he went to Rome. There he met with Hobart Archbishop Guilford Young (1916-1988), a progressive church leader who strongly impacted the development of church worship at both the international and national level, and Father Rush (1916-2001), who later became the Archbishop of Brisbane. Both were there attending Vatican II sessions (1962-1965). By then, Ferrier had developed close friendships with both men, as well as with Rob Copper, the diocese architect of Hobart. These friendships, which he maintained and cultivated during the following three decades, undoubtedly facilitated progressive liturgical discussion during the briefing and design stages of Ferrier’s ecclesiastical designs, and enabled him to fully comprehend and respond to the liturgical changes emerging from Vatican II.

And yet, even though Ferrier received several architectural awards and professional commendations, and although he was among the most progressive church architects in Queensland, his architectural work has not been given much recognition in Australian architectural historiography to date.

Little Churches Fluttering Everywhere
When asked about his work, Ferrier in the 1999 interview, stated: ‘[I] did a fair bit in the early days, maybe overlooked because not in the city, I did work in Dalby, Gatton, Mirani, Surat – there is little churches of mine fluttering everywhere’. This statement gives a skewed impression. During his career, Ferrier designed approximately thirty churches and chapels in Brisbane and throughout Queensland, most of which were built in the late 1960s and 1970s. Ferrier’s churches – although some were indeed literally ‘little’, and although many were ‘fluttering’ in the sense that they were spread over Queensland (and beyond) – were highly modern and progressive buildings that attest to his keen knowledge of international developments, as well as his detailed insight into the recommendations for liturgical renewal, formulated during Vatican II.

Two of his most progressive churches – both in architectural and liturgical terms – are the Good Shepherd Chapel, in the Brisbane suburb of Mitchelton (see Figures 1 and 2) and the Holy Spirit Church in Auchenflower (see Figures 3 and 4). Both were built in 1969, and both responded to the
international trend that emerged in the late 1960s – as a result of Vatican II – for churches to be more responsive to their suburban setting. This led to smaller, contextual church designs that were sympathetic to neighbouring residential dwellings and community infrastructure.  

![Figure 2. Good Shepherd Chapel, Mitchelton (Ferrier Baudet Archive); 1970 Photo (SLQ 6523-0001-0526)](image)

The chapel, a rare circular post-war ecclesiastical building in Queensland, beautifully demonstrates Ferrier’s experimentation with architectural form in response to new ideas for liturgical arrangement. Holy Spirit’s adoption of a fan-shaped plan to gather the congregation around and close to a carefully detailed sanctuary, with a humbler nearly domestic suburban scale exterior was equally very much in line with church design aspirations, both locally and internationally, post-Vatican II.

Both buildings received a favourable reception by the local Catholic Church. In August 1969, shortly after the opening of the Good Shepherd Chapel, the Catholic Leader, Brisbane Diocese’s weekly, wrote: ‘The chapel has been built on the basic pattern of a hexagon with the sides curved inward rather than straight, making the plan similar to a six-pointed star. Each side is divided into three parts by full height windows’. A few months later, the periodical also commended Holy Spirit for its humble suburban scale:

> The church is not pretentious, but merely a simple statement of man’s desire to honour and worship his Creator, and in consequence the human scale is acknowledged in the building’s proportions without forsaking the dignity which is essential to any sacred building.

The circular, curved forms and arced seating arrangement of Good Shepherd display ideas seen in well-published overseas chapels and churches. Pietro Belluschi’s Priory of St Gregory the Great (1961, Portsmouth, USA), for instance, also has concave curved walls separated by windows, while the circular skylight over the altar in Ferrier’s Good Shepherd is reminiscent of Eero Saarinen’s Chapel MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1955, Cambridge USA). In Australia, other architects experiment with the circular plans ahead of Ferrier: Ross K. Crimholm’s (of Cameron Chisholm & Nicol) Wesley College Chapel in Perth, and Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell’s St Faith’s Anglican Church in Burwood, for instance, preceded Good Shepherd and were published in both Cross-Section and Architecture in Australia – journals that Ferrier subscribed to.
Ferrier’s Holy Spirit Church reflects the same trend towards curved forms and references the scale, form and detailing of churches visited by Ferrier during his 1968 European travels. These included the well-known and highly influential Chapelle Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp (1955, France) by Le Corbusier. In terms of materiality, references to the brickwork church of St Mark’s by Sigurd Lewerentz (1960) in Stockholm-Börkhagen (Sweden) can be distinguished in Ferrier’s Holy Spirit. The fanned plan arrangement and resultant building form of Holy Spirit may also have gleaned from Hermann Baur’s Bruderklause Church Birsfelden (1959, Switzerland). This church combines a fan-shaped plan, with curves, flat roof planes and clerestories, but like Ronchamp uses concrete construction. It is safe to assume that Ferrier was also aware of Philip Hanman’s 180-degree fanned plan arrangement of St Joachim’s in Holland Park (Brisbane), which opened the year before Vatican II commenced. Another experimental local church that preceded Ferrier’s design for Holy Spirit was Cecil Hargraves’ 1965 Our Lady of Dolours in Mitchelton (Brisbane), which has a turned square plan.

The experimentation with gathered seating in the planning of both these buildings, the positioning of the altar to allow the priest to stand behind and the creation of more intimate spaces evidence both
Ferrier’s and his clients’ desires to respond to the outcomes of Vatican II. What Ferrier added to both designs was his rich knowledge of international developments in this field and his skilful architectural hand to provide buildings of architectural merit in form and materiality.

While Ferrier’s ‘little churches’ statement suggests that these buildings were unimportant, a closer examination suggests that his ‘little churches’ were highly attentive to the Catholic Church’s changing needs and emerging ideas within ecclesiastical architecture abroad. Repeatedly his chapels, cathedrals and churches introduce overseas ideas locally at pace with (and sometimes ahead of) his Queensland peers. Ferrier's work demonstrates that for him, each building was an individual experiment, which draws on lessons learnt in earlier designs, but was nonetheless highly adapted to each project’s context and brief.

**Designing For Climate**

In 1999 Ferrier stated: ‘I pride myself in, I was one of the very first to recognise the climate in Queensland, particularly North Queensland, as different from the climate in England’. Reviewing Ferrier’s designs, design commentary by others, and his own words it is obvious he prioritised climatically aware design:

> [I] sought to provide an atmosphere where you could get total cross-ventilation without getting wet in the wet seasons and the way to do that was to have big overhangs at the top (I’m speaking now of churches primarily) and to have a verandah on each side, with a roof over like here … and practically every church I did had that feature; where you could open it all up and get this nice cool breeze even though it was pouring rain outside. Made for a little more comfort, in those days they use to wear heavy suit coats and ties to mass.

Figure 5. St Peter's Church, Halifax (Tracey Nuttal, 2017)

Ferrier’s church designs typically have well considered cross-ventilation, high-level ventilation, shaded verandahs, eaves and good solar orientation. His North Queensland Halifax church (see Figures 5 and 6), which opened in October 1960 and received a Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) Queensland Chapter Commendation, was recognised for its cross-ventilation in *Cross-Section*: ‘Designed for the tropics, in Halifax Q’land, both sides of the nave of this church consist entirely of doors, to allow complete cross ventilation’. The A-frame form of this building evidences the transfer of church design ideas from the north Americas (USA and Canada) where it was extensively used in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was considered to be a very economic construction method and was generally well received by the church communities, who sought to achieve a modern external
aesthetic and internal volume be- fitting of a church. The A-Frame form was extensively used by Charles Edward Stade from 1954, and experimented with by many other American architects, including Eero Saarinen at Concordia Senior College (1957, Indiana, USA). In Australia, Buchan Laird and Buchan’s Geelong Grammar School Chapel (1959, Timbertop, Victoria) received recognition for its expressive A-frame design. Adapting these ideas to Queensland’s climate, Ferrier incorporated a vented roof ridge to draw and exhaust hot air from the space and openable doors to both sides of the worship space. He also orientated the building with the longer nave sides of the church to the north and south, shutting down the east and west elevations except for feature glazing.

Favourable reviews highlighting his buildings' climate-responsive design were also received for Ferrier's later ecclesiastical work. Of the Holy Spirit church in Auchenflower (1969), the Catholic Leader wrote: 'Ventilation is feature', and complemented the design for its generous openings that opened to prevailing north-east breezes and high-level windows that allowed hot air to escape. The periodical stated that Ferrier had placed ‘special emphasis … on the need for adequate ventilation so necessary in Brisbane’s climate’. Manipulating the section of the church by introducing two clerestories over the open-plan worship space, Ferrier provided both natural daylight and cross-ventilation. The shaded verandah spaces to the south-east, south and western facades provided further daylight, while limiting solar gain and adverse glare.

The 1961 opening of St Mary's, Charleville, received equally favourable coverage in the Brisbane Courier Mail, which described it as 'a contemporary styled church, lit through windows of gold and blue glass, and with plenty of cross-ventilation to suit the western climate'. His more modest budget Surat church was also complimented by the Brisbane Courier Mail in 1964 for its interesting use of materials, prefabricated features and overall climatically-responsive approach: 'The climatic conditions encouraged the departure from timber construction, which is also hard to get in the west … It replaces a building … unsuitable climatically.'

While it is clear that Ferrier took into account Queensland’s climatic conditions in his designs, his claim that he was ‘one of the very first’ to recognise the necessity of doing so necessitates some contextualisation. Reviewing the ecclesiastical work of other architects that were active in north Queensland at the time, such as Sid Barnes and Eddie Oribin in Cairns and the Townsville office of Lund Hutton Newell, the accuracy of Ferrier’s claim to be ‘one of the very first’ is quickly challenged. Oribin, for instance, has been recognised for his inventive use of materials, form and, importantly, his concern for passive climatic design in his churches in North Queensland – two of which are now on
the state heritage register. Lund Hutton Newell designed over seventy churches across the state, many of which paid close attention to the need to ventilate and shade the building. St Philip’s Church of England (1955) in Annerley (Brisbane), for instance, has openable windows down one side and doors opening up to a full length verandah on the other. Their well published St Matthew’s Mundingburra (Townsville), which received a RAIA Queensland Chapter Meritorious Architecture Award in 1960, has broad verandahs and a large shading roof. Besides, even before WWII, many Queensland churches in Romanesque and Spanish Mission style had full length side verandahs that enabled the worship space to be opened up entirely to capture prevailing breezes and provided ample shade.

Furthermore, when Ferrier was designing these buildings many local architects were researching, publishing and lecturing on climatic design, most notably: Robert Cummings, Karl Langer, Edward James Archibald Weller, John Dalton, Peter Newell, Balwant Singh Saini and Steve Szokolay. All involved in lecturing at the University of Queensland, they trained the next generation of architects, some of whom subsequently went onto work for Ferrier. Given Ferrier’s networking within the local and national RAIA and knowing that many on his staff were locally trained, it is fair to assume that Ferrier was aware of Cummings, Langer, Weller, Dalton, Newell, Saini and Szokolay’s research and certainly keenly applied their insights on how to design for climate in his ecclesiastic designs. So, while Ferrier may not have been ‘one of the very first’, he did achieve climatically considered buildings across Queensland’s hot and humid climate.

Conclusion
The 1999 interview is a record of Ferrier’s voice. This voice cannot be ignored, but quoted unchecked it also cannot be fully trusted. To provide due recognition there must be critical history research utilising a variety of research methods, as applied in this paper. Interrogating the veracity of two key statements by Ferrier’s – ‘there is little churches of mine fluttering everywhere’ and ‘I pride myself in, I was one of the very first to recognise the climate in Queensland, particularly North Queensland, as different from the climate in England’ – this paper demonstrates that Ferrier’s post-war ecclesiastical architecture is of architectural and religious historical importance. Each design responds (in its own way) to the Catholic Church’s changing liturgical needs and also attests to his broad knowledge of post-war trends in architecture. Ferrier’s ecclesiastical designs demonstrably take into account the local climate, even if he was not the very first to recognise the necessity of doing so. His collection of church buildings is varied, with differing forms, materials and plans adopted, and attests to his unabating resolve to produce exciting architecture that is directly relevant, in form and function, to each parish community.

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Quotation: What does history have in store for architecture today?

Endnotes

1 Queensland Catholic ecclesiastical buildings designed by Ferrier: St Patrick's Convent Chapel, Townsville (1959); St Peter's Church, Halifax (1960); St Mary's Church, Charleville (1961); St Patrick's Church, Ingham (1961); St Mary's Church, Gatton (1963); Mt St Bernard's School Chapel, Herberton (1963); St Mary's College Chapel, Dalby (1963); Church of the Immaculate Conception, Mirani (1965); Church of the Immaculate Conception, Surat (1965); St Monica's Cathedral, Cairns (1968); Good Shepherd Girls Home Chapel, Mitchelton (1969, demolished 2004); St Colom Mission Society Building Chapel, Toowong (1969, demolished); St Finbarr's Church, Quilpie (1969 un-built design); Holy Spirit Church, Auchenflower (1969); Holy Spirit Aged Home Chapel, Carseldine (1970); Mary McKillop Chapel, Annerley (1970); Church, Mt Sylvia (1971 un-built design); St Xavier’s Teacher’s College Chapel, Indooroopilly (1971, demolished early 2017); Twelve Apostles Church, Jindalee (1972; now the Hall); St Laurence’s College Chapel, South Brisbane (1973; now classroom space); Our Lady of Graces and St Martin De Porres Church, Carina (1973); Iona College Chapel, Lindum (1975); St Columba’s Church, Charters Towers (1974); St Joseph’s Church, Gayndah (1975); Holy Spirit Church, Cranbrook (1976); St Joseph’s Church, Murgon (1979); and the Papal Mass Podium QEI (1986). He also designed: Darwin Cathedral, NT (late 1950s); St Mary’s Cathedral, Port Moresby, PNG (1969); Alice Springs Church, NT (1960s); St Joseph's Church, Tweed Heads, NSW (1972) and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Everton Hills (1986). Collated by author from Ferrier Baudet archive and collected publications.


5 From late 1929.

6 July 1940, Ferrier was 11 years old.


8 First language French, plus Cantonese and English (Ilay Ferrier, Ian and Me).

9 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier.

10 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier. In the Interview Ferrier provided comment on the McGill course and lecturers including: Professor John Bland, Arthur Lismer, Gordon Webber and Harold Spence-Sales.


14 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier. John Patrick (J.P.) Donoghue (1965-1960), often referred to as ‘Jack’.


16 Hennessy and Hennessy designed a significant number of church buildings in Queensland and New South Wales, and were Archbishop Duhig’s preferred architects until the early 1960s.

17 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier, and confirmed by Catherine Baudet interviewed by Lisa Daunt December 22, 2017. These influences seem to have more directly influenced his house and hotel designs than his ecclesiastical buildings.


22 Vatican Council II (and the liturgical movement prior) resulted in significant architectural changes including: moving the alter forward, lowering the sanctuary, removing screens and altar rails, positioning the baptismal font within the main worship space and fanning the nave seating to gather the congregation around the sanctuary.

23 1960 RAIA Qld Commendation St Peter’s Church Halifax; 1964 RAIA Qld Building of the Year St Mary’s College, Dalby; 1971 RAIA Qld Citation Xavier Teacher’s College, Indooroopilly; 1980-81 National President of the RAIA; 1995/6 Inaugural Architect of the Year (awarded July 11, 1995 BOAQ); 1981 Honorary Fellow of the RAIC; 1982 Honorary Fellow AIA; Life Fellow RAIA; QUT Board (1982-89), Faculty of Architecture Board, UQ.

24 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier.


26 Two local circular/octagon planned churches pre-dating Ferrier’s chapel, both located in South Brisbane, are the Greek Orthodox Church of St Georges (c1960 designed by Blair Wilson of R. Martin Wilson & Son) and the Serbian Orthodox St Nicholas’s (c.1933, designed by Thomas Brenan Femester Gargett of Atkinson and Conrad).


29 Published in Architectural Record, (July 1959).


31 Wesley College Chapel published in Cross-Section, no79, (May 1959) and no105, (July 1961); and Architecture in Australia vol48 no2 (June 1959) and vol51 no1 (1962).


33 Brisbane’s first fan-shaped planned Catholic churches were St Joachim’s, Holland Park, opened 1961 (architect: P.J.L. Hanman); Our Lady Help of Christians, Hendra opened late 1961 (architect: Cecil Hargraves of Frank L. Cullen and Partners); and Our Lady of Dolours mid-1965 (architect: Cecil Hargraves of Frank Cullen, Fagg, Hargraves and Mooney).

34 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier.

35 Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier.

36 Cross Section Issue No. 102, (April 1961), 2.

37 Buggeln, The Suburban Church.

38 Buggeln, The Suburban Church.

39 The design was published at design stage in Architectural Forum, (December 1954); completed in Progressive Architecture, (December 1958); then in Albert Christ-Janer and Mary Mix Foley, Modern Church Architecture, (New York: Dodge Book Dept. McGraw-Hill, 1962.

40 Published in Cross-Section, no77, (March 1959); and Architecture in Australia vol48 no2 June 1959.

41 Evidenced in photos taken by Ferrier at a site visit just prior to the buildings completion, Ferrier Baudet Archive.


45 Ferrier was aware of and admired Lund Hutton Newell's work for the Church of England in North Queensland – he noted this in Gardiner, Hampson, Interview with Ian Ferrier.

46 St Paul's Church of England, Proserpine (1959) and the A-frame design of St Andrew’s Presbyterian, Innisfail (opened Nov 1961) https://environment.ehp.qld.gov.au/heritage-.

47 UQFL211 Lund Hutton Ryan Morton Collection.
50 Peter Young (interviewed 2017) attributed his time at the University of Queensland (1962–67) as where he gained his awareness of climatic and design, Peter worked for Ferrier 1965-68 and again late 1969–72.