



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct

(Block 1 and Block 7 Section 49, Watson)

At its meeting of 31 May 2018 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct was eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.



Image 1. Blackfriars facade (ACU 2017).



Image 2. Signadou and Blackfriars buildings shortly after construction, aerial image taken above Antill St and Phillip Ave intersection (Clarke 2013).

Concise History (http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/campuses/canberra/50/our_history)

In 1959 Archbishop Eris O'Brien invited the Dominican Sisters of Australia to open a College in Canberra to prepare Sisters from a number of congregations as teachers for the rapidly expanding diocesan Catholic Primary School system. Negotiations for a site began. A large site in the new northern suburb of Watson was made available for a Dominican complex: and plans developed for two buildings in modern monastic style - a Priory and House of Studies for Dominican Priests, and the national headquarters for the Dominican Sisters (the Generalizia) in a building which would include the Teachers' Training College - and a parish with both a church and primary school.

HISTORY

Under the administration of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), tasked with completing Canberra as the seat of government, Canberra grew from a population of 40,000 to 300,000, with this population boom accelerating in the late 1950s. On average, the NCDC was building a primary school every year and a high school every second year. The Catholic population of Canberra and the diocesan primary school system was also growing, and the Archbishop of the Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocese became concerned about the lack of Orders of Sisters and Brothers available to staff schools. Further, the Apostolic Delegate in Australia at the time, Archbishop Romolo Carboni, hoped for many of the religious Orders in Australia to amalgamate, and to eventually base their headquarters in the National Capital (Brown 1996).

On his appointment in 1953 as Archbishop in Canberra and Goulburn, Dr Eris O'Brien was confronted with the task of leading a Diocese that included well established country towns, a large rural hinterland and an exploding young capital city. Wishing to establish the national significance of the Archdiocese, he encouraged religious orders to move their headquarters to Canberra and many did, bringing to the small city energetic well educated and forward thinking religious men and women. At the same time Dr O'Brien invited religious orders including some from outside Australia to set up communities in the capital to staff the ever increasing number of schools. Unusually for the times, he fostered close cooperation between these orders (Clarke 2013: 8).

Under Archbishop Romolo Carboni's direction, in 1958, the four Dominican (Sister) groups in the country amalgamated to form the Dominican Sisters of Australia. Headquarters were required, and, since the Dominican Friars were about to base their foundation in Canberra, it was decided the Sister's headquarters, or, 'Generalizia' would also be here (Brown 1996).

There was appeal in locating the Dominican headquarters in a city that was set to become an administrative and educational hub, where various headquarters for national organisations, federal government departments, and important institutions would be situated. Canberra already boasted the Australian National University, and the Canberra College of Advanced Education (later the University of Canberra) would be opened in the 1960s.

**From "Blackfriars Priory," 1967,
commemorative publication for the opening
of Blackfriars Priory:**

From the black cloaks worn over their white habit, the Dominicans became known in England early in their history as black friars, and their houses and even the districts where they lived were called Blackfriars.

In England, quite apart from modern Dominican foundations, the name has survived with notable historical associations in several places.

The London Blackfriars, which gave its name to a district and to a bridge over the Thames, was built in 1278, at the end of Fleet Street and the boundary of Ludgate. It stood on the Thames in the southwest corner of the city walls.

Indeed, the Dominican Order has a long association with universities. The motto of the Dominican Order is 'Truth.' This word captures its life, its apostolate and its purpose. The ideal of the Friar Preacher is to possess Truth in order to diffuse it by preaching and teaching. To achieve this, the Dominican Order has always set great store in study. In order to provide the best opportunities for study and in turn to exercise the greatest influence in the environment where learning is pursued and intellectual life is generated, developed and propagated, St Dominic planned to make the first foundations of his Order in university cities. Thus Toulouse, Paris, Bologna, and Oxford were amongst the first cities to receive the Friars Preachers. The Dominican Order still establishes itself in university cities ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967: 6). Furthering its association with universities, the Dominican Order established John XXIII College at the Australian National University. The College was completed in 1969, and coincided with the completion and opening of the Chapel of St John the Evangelist, the first chapel on the campus

(ANU 2012).

The presence of the Dominican Order in Australasia is the result of expansion of the Catholic Church's global missionary outreach in the nineteenth century, assisted by thousands of priests, brothers and nuns. The chief home source of manpower for the Australasian Dominican mission was Ireland where the Church was undergoing revitalisation and growth with the passing of the penal era. The first Dominican arrived on the Australian continent in 1831, and the first community of Dominican Friars was established in Adelaide in 1898. Eight Dominican Sisters arrived in south eastern Australia in 1867, and established themselves at Maitland, NSW, and subsequently established seven foundations throughout New South Wales and Victoria (Dowd N.D).

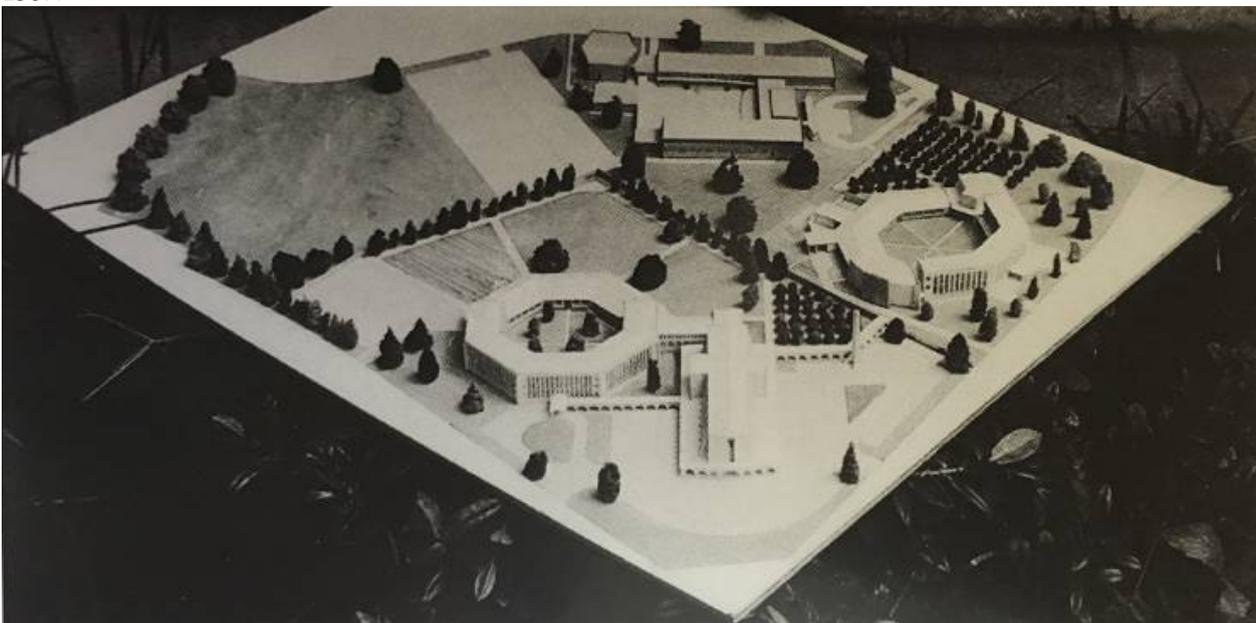
Until 1958 each foundation had retained its separate identity. Like other Catholic foundations in Australia, each trained its own Sisters not just for their religious lives, but for life in the classroom. In 1958 these four groups were amalgamated to form the Dominican Sisters of Australia with Mother Philomena Waite, from the province first established in Maitland NSW, and now with a presence across much of eastern Australia, as first Prioress General (Clarke 2013: 9).

At this time the Dominican Fathers were also setting up their headquarters in Canberra, so a central Dominican complex was envisaged. This was to include:

- a Priory and house of studies for the Priests;
- a national headquarters and teaching college for the Sisters (the Generalizia); and
- a Parish with both a church and primary school (Clarke 2013: 9).

Initially, the Catholic Archdiocese, in consultation with the NCDC, envisaged the Dominican site at O'Connor, near Dryandra Street. However this presented issues for the Church as it would be difficult to procure the estimated 12 acres required for the facility at the O'Connor site (NCDC 1958; Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn 1959). In 1959 ongoing negotiations resulted in the NCDC making an area of land in Watson available to the Dominican Order. Additional negotiations between the NCDC and Catholic Archdiocese occurred, extending the Watson site from 12 acres to 16, in order to accommodate a larger Parish Primary School than originally planned (see Image 3), and its associated playing fields (NCDC 1962a and 1962b).

In 1963 the Signadou¹ building was officially opened by Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies. (ACU 2015). Adjacent (west) of Signadou, Blackfriars Priory was built. It was officially opened in 1967.



¹ The name Signadou means Sign of God. Dominic De Guzman the Spanish Canon Regular, who founded the Dominican Order, had in his lifetime, seen a vision of a bright light (ie a Sign of God) shining over the place in Spain where he set up a monastery of teaching (Brown 1996).

Image 3. Model of the intended Dominican complex in Watson. The parish church, as pictured south of Blackfriars building, was not built according to the intended design. However, the remainder of the complex reflected early design plans (Clarke 2013).



Image 4. Image shows the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings shortly after construction in the context of the new suburb of Watson, with two large areas set aside for non-residential purposes on opposite sides of the Antill Street and Phillip Avenue intersection (“Blackfriars Priory” 1967).

Signadou

At its opening in the early 1960s, the teacher training course offered by Signadou teaching college lasted one year, at the end of which the Sisters would receive a Teacher’s Certificate. However, by 1967 this had been formalised into a two year certificate, coinciding with increasing lay student entries into Signadou teaching college, and declining numbers of women entering and remaining in religious vocations. By 1970 the Teachers’ Certificate course became a three year program. Students were required to undertake periods of teaching practice each year as a part of their studies in one of the eleven Canberra Catholic primary schools which had opened in the early 1960s. Eventually the number of lay students increased, and in 1975 the first male students enrolled. By the following year, Sisters formed only a minority of student body, which was by then comprised mostly of students from the general public (ACU 2015).

Signadou opened at a time of great change in Australia and in the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council, which heralded renewal for the Catholic Church, had been underway since October 1962. The first Federal funding to non-government schools was imminent. For the first time since the 1880s lay teachers were being appointed to the teaching staff of Catholic parish schools as the numbers of children in classes grew and the numbers of people in religious orders began to decline (Clarke 2013: 13).

As well as providing more support for school education, the Commonwealth Government was taking a stronger role in funding and accrediting tertiary institutions and their programs. In 1966, Commonwealth Advanced Education Scholarships became available through Signadou teaching college, open to both lay students and Sisters (Clarke 2013: 13). McIntosh (1996) observes the rapid expansion in school enrolments during the 1950s and 1960s that State governments found difficult to resource adequately. The predominant non-government sector was the Catholic sector and these schools were suffering from overcrowding, inadequate buildings and shortages of properly trained teachers.

Further, as the Commonwealth government was the jurisdiction with the best revenue base it was to this level that parents, educators and others forcefully put the case that the Commonwealth should make up the shortfall in school funding, not only to government but also to non-government schooling. The problem however, with 'state aid' to private schools, was that many associated this with aid to Catholic schools - they were the sector that would get the most 'state aid'.

Pressures on the schooling sectors and the fact that education had become a significant electoral issue led to a changing political atmosphere. Prior to 1964, the States funded government schools directly and the Commonwealth provided general revenue grants to the States, a portion of which was used by the States to supplement their funding for government schools. However in 1964 direct Commonwealth funding for government and non-government schools began with the passage through the Commonwealth Parliament of the *States Grants (Science Laboratories and Technical Training) Act 1964*, which enabled funding for science laboratories and equipment for secondary schools. Since that time, Commonwealth funding for schools has increased markedly with in excess of \$3b being allocated in 1996 to both government and non-government schools (McIntosh 1996).

In the ACT region the issue of government funding was exemplified by the 1962 Goulburn protest, which acted as a 'flash point' for discontent in other parts of Australia on the question of government aid, specifically State in this instance. In July 1962 around 600 of Goulburn's catholic students were enrolled in local public schools in protests over the state government's lack of funding. Protesters made the point that if the government couldn't fund vital infrastructure at the city's Catholic schools, then Catholic students should be absorbed into the public system. The protest was called off after a week and soon afterwards Our Lady of Marcy Primary School won its new toilet block (Goulburn Post 2012).

Government expectations of teacher qualifications continued to grow, and in 1979, Signadou was approved to offer a three year Diploma of Teaching. Like other Australian higher education institutions, the teaching college was now receiving most of its funding through the Commonwealth Government. At the same time, a series of upgrading courses were offered, which permitted teachers with one, two or three year certificate qualifications to upgrade to Diploma level (ACU 2015).

The amalgamated Dominican Sisters of Australia dissolved in 1988, resulting in new Dominican Provinces in Western Australia and South Australia who were no longer associated with Signadou teaching college. A new company representing the Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands, and the priests from the Dominican Province of the Assumption, was established to take responsibility for the Signadou teaching college (Clarke 2013: 16).

Owing to changes in the accreditation, funding, and structure of higher education by the Australian Government, small institutions like Signadou were at risk of closure by the late 1980s, and it was becoming financially difficult for Signadou to act as a modest-sized, independent college. Under the Government's reform of higher education, public accountability became a high priority, and stringent requirements for Universities to provide detailed plans, profiles, financial reports and statistics to justify courses and research formed part of the new package (Clarke 2013: 18).

Prospering and remaining relevant and competitive in the late 1980s was a challenge for Signadou teaching college. In order to remain competitive and financially viable, Signadou expanded by amalgamating with the three other Catholic colleges in eastern Australia (Catholic College of Education in Sydney, Institute of Catholic Education in Victoria, and McAuley College of Education in Brisbane) to form the Australian Catholic University (ACU) in 1989 (Clarke 2013: 18).

Prior to forming the Australian Catholic University, it was uncertain whether an amalgamated body with small, separate campuses could have university status and under what conditions. In the late 1980s, Australia's existing universities were all established under state acts of Parliament, and there was no precedent for a university that encompassed four state jurisdictions. In addition, universities in Australia had been traditionally secular, and as such the idea of a government funded Catholic university was unusual (Clarke 2013: 19).

For Signadou to have credibility as Campus of the ACU, it needed to be functioning at as high a level as possible. The first Bachelor's degree course, a Bachelor of Education Conversion which enabled experienced teachers holding a diploma to upgrade their qualification, was approved in 1989 (Clarke 2013: 19)

Some Dominican sisters were still living in the Signadou building in the 1990s, but a decision that they relocate to smaller houses off site meant that the building became available for campus use. During this decade the Australian Catholic University added additional qualifications and bachelor degrees to the Signadou campus program,

such as religious studies and social work (ACU 2015).

Research institutes were established on campus during the first decade of the 2000s – the Institute of Child Protection Studies in 2005, and in 2009 the Public Policy Institute. A Bachelor of Nursing degree started on campus in 2007, and later, in 2012 a paramedicine course became available (ACU 2015).

In 2013 the Australian Catholic University ‘Signadou’ Campus celebrated 50 years since its opening.

Blackfriars Priory

The Dominican’s intention for Blackfriars Priory was to ensure a church and studentate – a ‘Studium Generale’ – where young men preparing for the priesthood in the Order would be prepared for their work by pursuing courses in philosophy, theology, and those doing subsidiary subjects (Image 5). Those attending the university in Canberra could be housed in convenient proximity. The priory was to include assembly rooms and lecture halls, and from the initial accommodation for about forty it was later upgraded for about one hundred (Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn 1958).

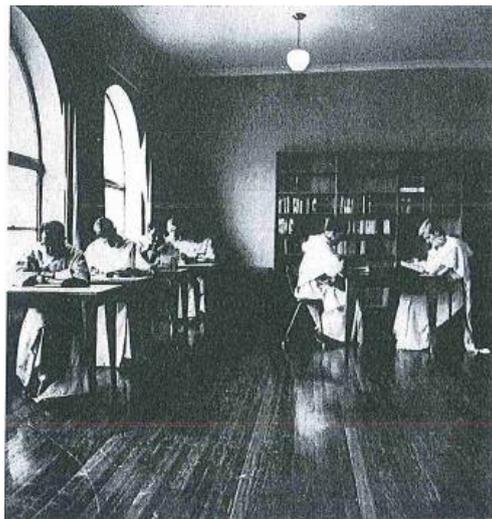


Image 5. Members of the Dominican Order studying in Blackfriars Priory: the “Studium Generale” (“Blackfriars Priory” 1967).

On 25 March 1963, the first sod was turned on the site of the Blackfriars Priory, and construction began on the site on 31 October the same year. On 12 March 1966, Dominican monks in the ACT moved into the uncompleted priory. The first Prior, Very Rev. Bernard Curran, was appointed on the same day. Father Curran was Prior of St Dominic’s, Melbourne, since 1960, before which he was the first Superior of the Canberra community of Dominicans (“Blackfriars Priory” 1967: 9). In 2003, as the first moves towards offering a nursing degree through the Australian Catholic University were being taken, the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn began negotiating with the Dominican Fathers about acquiring Blackfriars Priory for the campus (Clarke 2013: 25). At the end of 2003 an agreement regarding Blackfriars was signed and was finalised in 2004 when the Dominican priests vacated the building. The building was acquired by the Archdiocese, with funding provided by the Australian Catholic University and on the condition that it would be used only as a university. This significantly increased the amount of space available for the university, and the building was ready for campus use in 2005 (Clarke 2013:25). The Dominican Friars retained one wing for five years as a residence, and the top floor of the building was leased to Centacare (now CatholicCare). For nearly forty years it had been the residence of the Dominican friars in Canberra (Clarke 2013: 86).

Parish Church and Primary School

Holy Rosary Church, located between the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings, was consecrated in 1977 and lies outside the boundary of the nomination application. A parish church was conceptualised in the original design intent for the Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct (Image 3). In 1973, architect Kevin J. Curtin produced a fully detailed design for a parish church with a ring of 16 concrete-blade spires. However this design was never implemented, and a split blockwork church designed by Civil & Civic Pty Limited was constructed (AIA 2016). Holy Rosary Church was completed

and consecrated over a decade after Signadou and Blackfriars were opened, and it has functioned since as a community parish church.

Rosary Primary School is located north of the Signadou building. The school was planned as a demonstration school for the teaching college. The arrangement of the school in relation to the Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct remains true to the original design even as of 2017 practical teaching experience has always been an essential component of primary education courses. In 1963 and the following years, Signadou students spent 120 hours in one of the Catholic schools in Canberra – including at Watson (run by Dominican Sisters), Lyneham (Ursulines), O'Connor (Josephites), Dickson (Brigidines), Braddon (Sisters of Mercy) Manuka (Good Samaritan Sisters) and Campbell (Sisters of the Holy Faith). Classroom observation was important as a precursor to actual classroom experience, and demonstration lessons were conducted by expert teachers at Rosary Demonstration School until 1982, after which it ceased functioning as a demonstration school (Clarke 2013: 36).

Design

Records and publications from the 1960s provide conflicting information as to who the design credit for Signadou and Blackfriars buildings belongs to.

Brown (1996: 8) in her memoir of the early years of Signadou notes:

Kevin Curtin was engaged as the architect (he had designed the new Santa Sabina Chapel) and he was ably assisted by Fr Bonaventure Leahy OP. Fr Leahy was not in fact a fully qualified architect, but he had architectural interests and skills, a love of simple but beautiful line and style, and a deep sense of the requirements of religious women in their living arrangements.

The commemorative publication that accompanied the blessing and opening of the Blackfriars building ("*Blackfriars Priory, Canberra ACT, Solemn Blessing and Opening*" 1967: 7) states:

The planning and designing of the entire project were in the hands and care of Father Bonaventure Leahy, O.P. Detailed plans and scale models, executed and completed by Father Leahy, were the first signs towards the fulfilment of a great undertaking, which has been finished within four years.

NCDC file records suggest that Kevin Curtin and Partners submitted documents which were approved by the Commission and by Church authorities:

A master plan, model, and sketch plans have been submitted by Mr Kevin Curtin, Architect. All buildings have been approved by the Church authorities and are to be constructed in rotation commencing with the Dominican Sister training college (NCDC 1960).

The NCDC was pleased with the design at this stage, noting:

The scale of the whole project lends itself to monumental treatment, and every advantage has been taken of this to create a design of quality, and full vigour, dignity and character.

The monastic purpose of the Priory and training school are suitably expressed, and their simplicity provides a splendid foil for the richer treatment of the church and school – the shape and forms of which show so well how traditional architecture may be expressed through the medium of contemporary materials and methods of construction. One hopes that the detailing and materials used will be worthy of the conception. If so, this will be a notable contribution to the architectural quality of Canberra, and will give much needed interest to this low lying part of the city.

The master plan and sketch plans are recommended for approval as to siting and design.

At a later date, it Kevin J. Curtin and Partners had reduced their involvement. A Department of Interior correspondence of (NCDC 1963) noted the following:

The Commission has considered the design and siting of the Dominican Brothers College, Watson. It is noted

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Signadou and Blackfriars Precinct, Australian Catholic University

that drawings submitted for approval of master planning, preliminary design, and siting in the initial stages was under the name of Kevin J Curtin and Partners, Architects. The drawings now presented adhere to the same master plan and generally follow the approved design. However, no architectural or consulting structural firms' names appear on the drawings.

The drawings mentioned were apparently Fr Leahy's. The same correspondence notes that Kevin Curtin and Partners were no longer involved with the proposal at this time, but also noted that there was no requirement for detailed building plans to be prepared by an architect, as the organisation was more concerned with design and siting rather than the quality and presentation of drawings.

Clarke, in her 2013 history of Signadou teaching college, refers to Fr Leahy as a 'gifted amateur architect' who acted as Clerk of Works (specifically for the construction of Blackfriars) and notes that Kevin Curtin and Partners formally took on the task of design and construction, working (as discussed above) from Fr Leahy's ideas. She says:

Kevin Curtin, having already had significant experience with Church buildings, worked effectively with the varying and sometimes testing requirements of the Archdiocese, the NCDC, Fr Leahy and the Dominican sisters, keeping construction on track and budget (p. 10).

However, "Blackfriars Priory, Canberra ACT, Solemn Blessing and Opening" (1967) credits Kevin J. Curtin & Partners as consulting structural engineers. This is corroborated by a Canberra Times piece of 1966 which also lists Kevin J. Curtin & Partners as structural engineers for heating and lighting. Evidently, Curtin's involvement with the project had not ceased entirely.

Father Bonaventure Leahy

Fr Bonaventure Leahy had undertaken architectural training before he joined the Dominican order in Ireland. Prior to working on the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings, he collaborated with other architects on the design and planning of the Chapel at Santa Sabina Convent, Strathfield NSW. The convent was established in 1894 by Dominican Sisters.

Sometime after the completion of Signadou and Blackfriars, he was sent to Western Australia to design urgently needed classrooms for Holy Rosary School in Perth. Soon after his arrival he was asked to prepare plans for a church to be built south of the school. Fr Bonaventure's work culminated in the construction of the Toodyay Stone Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Woodlands, WA. This church is listed on the local heritage list for the City of Sterling, Western Australia as an excellent example of Late Twentieth Century Organic architecture (The Record 2009). During all stages of construction of the Blackfriars building, students and brothers in the Dominican community are said to have worked under Fr Leahy's direction and contributed much to the finishing of the Blackfriars building. The temporary Chapel was apparently used as a joinery and carpenter's workshop, and many of the furnishings in the Priory were made on-site, as demonstrated in Image 6 ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967).

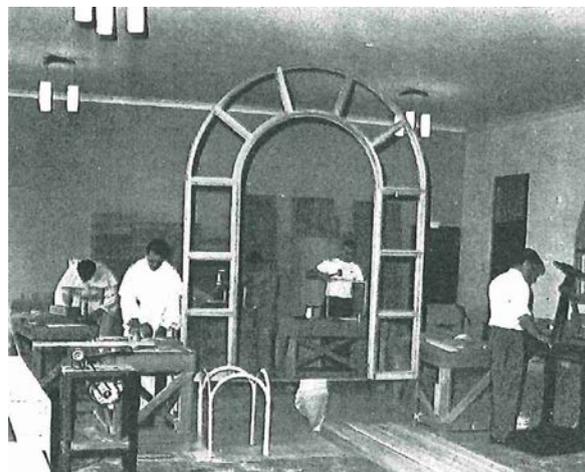


Image 6. On-site joinery and carpenters workshop, with Dominicans as well as contractors working on furnishings and structural elements ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967).

Kevin Curtin

Kevin Joseph Curtin established the practice Curtin and Cameron in Sydney 1953. Eventually his practice was renamed Kevin J. Curtin & Partners (AIA 2016).

At the Australian National University, Curtin designed the John XXIII College and the Chapel of St John the Evangelist, the first chapel on the campus. They opened in 1969, the same year as Curtin's Yowani Country Club in Lyneham. Other clubs designed by Curtin include Canberra Southern Cross Club (1972) Canberra Royals Club (1975) and Queanbeyan Leagues Club Redevelopment in 1975 (AIA 2016).

Canberra schools designed by Curtin include Canberra Catholic Girls High School, now Merici College, Braddon (1959), St. John Vianney's Primary School, Warramanga (1971), St Matthew's Catholic Primary School, Page (1971), St Francis Xavier Catholic High School, Florey, (1976) and Padua Catholic High School, Wanniasa in 1978 (AIA 2016).

A prominent example of Curtin's architecture in Canberra is the former ACT TAB, now TransACT, brick office tower and annex on Northbourne Avenue, Dickson, built between 1975 and 1978 (AIA 2016).

Notable churches designed by Curtin include:

- St Joseph's Catholic Church, O'Connor.
- Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Curtin.
- St Monica's, Church North Parramatta (1960). This church boasts a rectangular plan-shape and remarkable nine-bay A-frame roof with the radical plan and intense verticality expressed in Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style (1960–) buildings.
- Marist Brothers Chapel, Kogarah (1961), a two-storey circular chapel and assembly hall with a radiating pre-cast concrete folded-plate roof.
- Mt Saint Bernard's Church, Mascot (1955). Credited as the first church in Australia of parabolic design.

Description

Signadou and Blackfriars are free standing, octagonal shaped brick buildings set prominently on and addressing the Phillip Avenue and Antill Street intersection. Blackfriars is set back 100m from the intersection, with Signadou sitting roughly 150m back. Their exteriors are finished with sprayed white stucco concrete. Only the Lewin's Library on the eastern side of Signadou is without render, and is instead clad in bluestone. Both buildings are single storeyed on three (northern) sides, an arrangement that admits northerly sunlight into the central courtyards and building interiors. Both buildings have articulated facades with repetitive patterns of vertical fenestration spanning three storeys to the street elevations (Clarke 2013: 84-85).

The western extent of the Signadou building's exterior is curved, instead of straight-sided like the rest of the octagon. This curved facade represents the Signadou chapel.

The complementary buildings originally constructed for the Dominican Sisters (Signadou) and for the Friars (Blackfriars) have a distinctive presence, making an architectural statement unusual in Australia and unique in Canberra (Clarke 2013: 84-85).

Signadou was built for several purposes and its design reflects this. The building faces Antill Street, with three entrances on that side. A small entrance provides direct access to the chapel, a large central door was the entrance to the Dominican Convent and the headquarters of the Dominican Sisters of Australia (the Generalizia) and a slightly set back door was the entrance for students studying at Signadou and is the entrance to the Lewins Library as of 2017. Like the Blackfriars building, Signadou was built around a garth, with the cloister making it possible to circumnavigate the ground floor. For some years, only the Sisters were permitted to access the cloister (Clarke 2013: 84-85).

As one entered the student door, on the right were the teaching spaces for the College – a large diamond shaped lecture room with an upper gallery (known as St Thomas), two other classrooms and a room that housed the small College library. Beyond these was a section restricted to Dominican Sisters, containing their community room, dining room, kitchen and laundry. On the left side of the student entrance were the College principal's office and the student's dining room. The main entrance led to the office area for the Generalizia, and then to the chapel. The upper

levels included many bedrooms for the Sisters, the infirmary and other convent spaces (Clarke 2013: 84-85).

Recreational facilities for students were limited, but in the late 1960s a donation allowed for a swimming pool for the sisters. In order to accommodate the need for additional space in subsequent decades, demountable buildings were installed and used on the Campus (Clarke 2013: 84-85).

In the early 1990s, after the Dominican Sisters moved out of the Signadou building, the first major works on the building since 1963 commenced. These works were financed through a Commonwealth grant and the Signadou Building Fund. This work saw major improvements to the library, teaching spaces and offices, and to electronic and technological resources (Clarke 2013: 86).

The Blackfriars building was built with the utilities required for both religious and academic life. At its opening in 1967, the octagon of the ground floor was equipped with reception and guest facilities, the Brothers' cloister and common room, library, lecture halls and refectory together with domestic areas. It was intended that the largest lecture hall was to be used as a temporary chapel until the Parish church was built ("Blackfriars Priory" 1957: 11).

Five sections of the octagon rise two stories above the ground floor. The top floor originally provided accommodation for the clerical Brothers, their chapel and common room. The first floor had accommodation for the Studium and Parish staff, together with other Fathers engaged in the works of the apostolate. This floor also had provision for student Fathers ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967: 11).

The cloister encloses the garth, with the former enabling access to the latter through four doors. A succession of windows in Roman arches (see Image 7) gave an almost unbroken view of its various aspects and its central fountain. Recreation and maintenance areas were situated on the northern side of the main buildings ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967: 11).



Image 7. 'Roman arches' in the Blackfriars building cloister (ACT Heritage 2016).

As with Signadou, Blackfriars building is embellished with blue stonework, the entry in particular (see Image 8). The main doorway into Blackfriars also employs a (timber) shafted jam, which Apperley et al (1994) defines as a jam embellished by a cluster of column shafts (Image 9).

After the building was acquired by the Australian Catholic University in 2004, it was transformed for use by the Campus, providing new lecture rooms, many new offices, elevators, a cafe, meeting rooms, an Indigenous unit and a free-standing student centre (Clarke 2013: 86).

The cloister is adorned with five mosaic murals (Images 10-14), four by Father Maurice Keating, O.P., who was a member of the Studium staff. The fifth mosaic was the work of Br. Francis McKinnon O.P. Fr Maurice Keating is said to have instructed students in the arts of mosaic and oils. In Image 15 he is shown putting finishing touches to some copies of early Madonnas, Paintings of St Dominic and other saints to be hung in the Blackfriars building. The four murals in the cloister depict moments of ecclesiastical history. A Canberra Times piece from 9 February 1966 shows craftsmen putting finishing touches to painted mosaic mural pieces (Image 16)



Image 8. Formal entrance to Blackfriars building, highlighting bluestone detailing (ACT Heritage 2017).



Image 9. Timber detail work in the entrance door to Blackfriars building (ACT Heritage 2017)

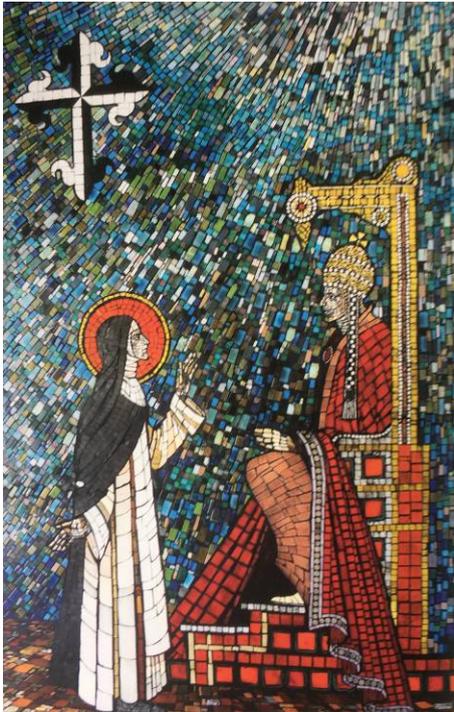


Image 10. St Catherine of Siena, 1970, Fr Maurice Keating , OP. wall mosaic. ST Catherine, doctor of the Church, advises Pope Gregory XI to return from Avignon to Rome. The Dominican cross is pictured in the top left corner (image from Clarke 2013).



Image 11. 1970, Fr Maurice Keating, OP. wall mosaic (ACT Heritage 2017).

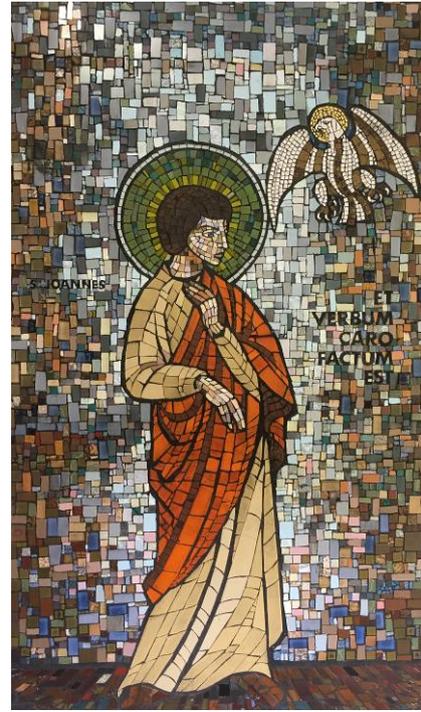


Image 12 1970, Fr Maurice Keating , OP. Wall mosaic (ACT Heritage 2017).

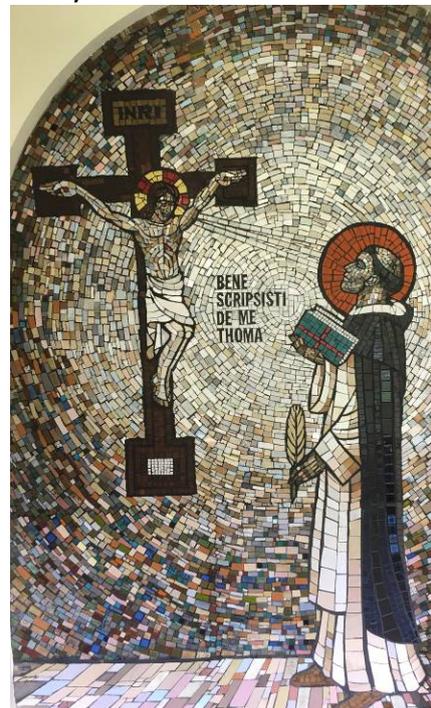


Image 13 1970, Fr Maurice Keating , OP. Wall mosaic. A small silver plaque on the mosaic reads: *The Crucified Christ speaks to St Thomas Aquinas: "You have written well of me, Thomas."* (ACT Heritage 2017).

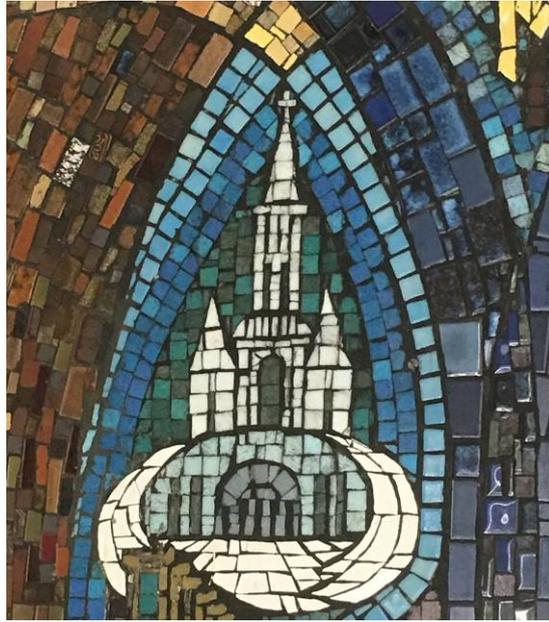


Image 14. Detail on fifth mosaic: 'Our Lady' by Br. Francis McKinnon O.P. in Blackfriars cloister (ACT Heritage 2017).

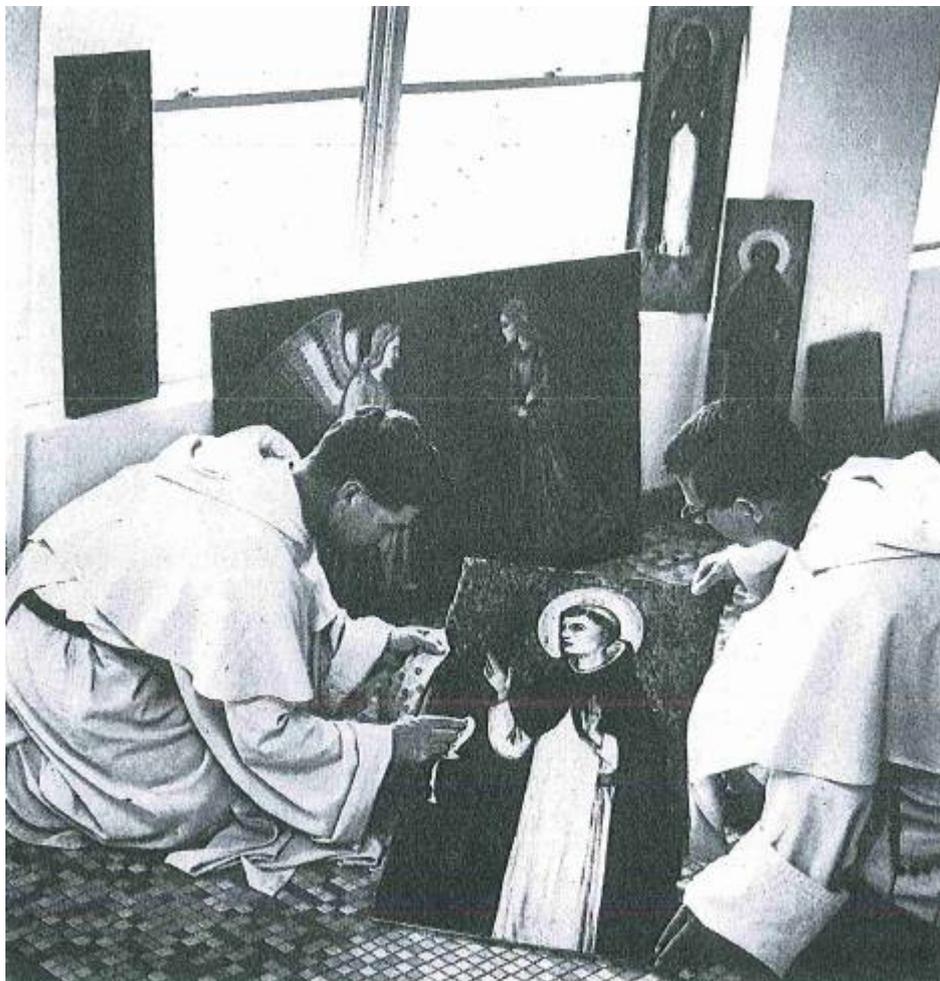


Image 15 Father Maurice Keating puts the finishing touches to some copies of early Madonnas and other paintings to be hung in the Blackfriars building ("Blackfriars Priory" 1967).



Image 16. Craftsmen work on painted mosaic mural pieces for the Blackfriars building (Canberra Times 1966). It is not specified whether the craftsmen shown are Dominicans.

A St Dominic's Orange tree (Bitter Orange, *Citrus aurantium*) was planted commemoratively on the west side of the Signadou building in 1988 (Image 17). This tree originates from cuttings taken from the orange tree at the Dominican Order's Santa Sabina College in Strathfield, NSW, which in turn was planted in 1895 from a cutting taken from the Dominic's Orange Tree from the Dominican Convent of Santa Sabina, Rome.



Image 17 Commemorative St Dominic's Orange tree (Bitter Orange, *Citrus aurantium*) outside Signadou building (ACT Heritage 2017).

The Chapel (Image 18)

In her memoir of the early years of Signadou teaching college, Brown (1996: 13) recalls:

The Chapel was considered to be quite a gem. The Carrara marble altar, the sleek candlesticks and matching sanctuary lamps, and the massive urns for flowers were much admired, even though the latter were sometimes cursed by struggling Sister-florists. The carved Crucifix suspended over the altar was donated by Kevin Curtin in memory of his twin brother who was killed in action in World War II, a practice Kevin carried out in every church or chapel he designed [There are] eleven small windows [in the Chapel which] symbolise the five joyful and five sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary, with one window symbolising the glorious mysteries. The tall nave windows represent the Church and the Dominican Order. The Chapel parquetry is of Johnson River hardwood, the stalls of silver ash.

Built on the westside of the Signadou building, the chapel was the worship place for the Dominican Sisters, for their Holy Office, Mass and other devotions (Clarke 2013: 88). Its rendered facade is broken by four vertical blue stone panels (see Image 19).



Image 18 Carrara marble altar in the Signadou chapel, moved forward to bring the priest closer to the flock after the Second Vatican Council. Reredos (screen) shown behind (Clarke 2013).



Image 19. Blue stone panels cladding the Signadou Chapel (Clarke 2013).

Although there is no window on the high wall above the altar, on each side of the sanctuary are full length windows formed from small rectangular panes of coloured glass, a motif repeated in several areas of the Signadou building (Image 20, and Image 21). These windows would have originally illuminated the altar, but it was moved forward after the Second Vatican Council to reflect liturgical changes (Clarke 2013: 88).



Image 20. Stained glasswork in the Signadou Chapel (Clarke 2013).

The main source of light is from the east. The east wall has a full length window at each end, and eleven small narrow windows on its upper section.



Image 21. Small rectangular panels of glass in the Signadou building: a recurring motif, comparable to glasswork in the Chapel (ACT Heritage 2016).

All the fittings were commissioned for the Chapel, and these have been kept, so the integrity of its design has been maintained. Four rows of wooden stalls intended for use by the Sisters, step out and down from the long curved wall on the eastern side. There is a small balcony on the upper level, apparently a choir loft (Image 22) designed to provide access to the Chapel for sisters who were unwell in the infirmary on the first floor (Clarke 2013: 88). The Chapel continues in active use for Mass and other religious ceremonies.



Image 22. Choir loft in the Signadou Chapel (Clarke 2013).

Artwork

Although not a complete inventory of pieces acquired by the Dominican complex, the list below highlights some key artworks present in the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings:

- The eleven small narrow windows inside the Signadou Chapel (Images 20 and 22) were designed by Hungarian born artist Stephen Moor who had come to Australia in 1950. Like all the fittings in the Chapel they are contemporary in design, containing stylised representations of the Church, the Mysteries of the Rosary, and the Dominican Order (Clarke 2013: 88).

Stephen Moor became a dominant figure in the stained glass scene in Sydney, bringing his distinctive

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European/Germanic style to bear on a craft largely mired in the 19th century. He was part of a movement that reinvigorated the liturgical and residential stained glass of the time. Moor's work can be found throughout Eastern Australia. The 1981 rose window of St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, he considered one of his finest works (Australian Art Auction Records N.D.).

- The life sized statue of St Dominic, originally in the foyer of the Signadou building but now in the Chapel, was commissioned from the Spanish sculptor Jose Espelta in Barcelona, (Clarke 2013: 89).



Image 23. Jose Espelta, St Dominic 1970 (Clarke 2013).

- Wooden Stations of the Cross in the Chapel, carved by the religious sculptor Mrs Leopoldine Mimovich, made of Queensland beech. (Clarke 2013: 89).

After arriving in Australia from Austria after World War II and enduring an arduous migration experience, Leopoldine (Poldi) set up her studio in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and undertook commissions which reflected her Austrian traditions and Catholic background. Over time her work evolved into an impressionistic, free-flowing form and she began to work with Australian materials such as Huon pine (Stevenson, M. And McFadzean, M. 2010).

- To Mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Signadou, a free-standing sculpture of St Catherine of Siena (see Image 24) was commissioned from the sculptor Linda Klarfeld, a companion work to the wooden statue of St Dominic in the Chapel (Clarke 2013: 86).



Image 24. Free standing sculpture of Catherine of Siena by Linda Klarfield (Clarke 2013).

Klarfield began creating portrait busts of influential Australians early in her career as well as focusing on emotional and dramatic religious themes. At the age of 21 she had already established herself as one of Australia's foremost young sculptors when she received a large public commission to create the Stations of the Cross. It was from here that her reputation grew quickly, making her one of the best known figurative bronze sculptors in Australia. Her most recognised public sculptures include a statue of Dr Victor Chang, a sculpture of St Mary Mackillop and 'Expressions of Love' the centrepiece of the Hunter Valley Gardens (Linda Klarfield Sculptures N.D.).

- In 1995 a large sculpture, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (Guy Boyd) was given to the campus by Mrs Phyllis Boyd, widow of the sculptor (Clarke 2013: 85). In 1964 Guy Boyd (of the Boyd family dynasty) began his career in sculpture. At a time when abstract sculpture prevailed, he was committed to figurative art, but he soon won high praise for his finely textured work in bronze and in aluminium overlaid with silver, and for the strength and delicacy of his female nudes. His first big commissions included wall sculptures for Tullamarine (1970) and Sydney (1971) airports (Niall 2007).

By the later years of his career he had also become a public figure who did not shirk controversy. A former president (1973-76) of the Port Phillip Bay Conservation Council, he remained active in environmental matters: he was arrested in 1983 while protesting against the damming of the Franklin River in Tasmania. With his wife and elder daughters he campaigned tirelessly to reverse Lindy Chamberlain's conviction for murdering her baby daughter Azaria, at Uluru (Niall 2007).



Image 25. *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (Guy Boyd) donated in 1995 (Clarke 2013).

- Four mosaic murals in the Blackfriars cloister, by Father Maurice Keating, O.P. depicting moments of ecclesiastical history (Images 10 to 13). The mosaics were made using ceramic chips, cement and fibre-cement backing (Maurice Keating personal communication 4 April 2017).
 - St Thomas Aquinas addressed by the crucifix – an event witnessed by his community. Latin: “You have written well of me Thomas” (after his tract on the Eucharist).
 - St Bernadette at the Lourde Grotto.
 - St Catherine of Sienna addressing the Pope at Avalon telling him to return to Rome.
 - St John the Evangelist. Latin: “The word became flesh.”
- One mosaic in the Blackfriars cloister: Our Lady by Br. Francis McKinnon O.P. (Image 14).

The Australian Catholic University has seven campuses as of 2017, all in possession of notable art collections. Recently, the ACU produced a short documentary on its contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition, particularly through art and symbol. The documentary aimed to demonstrate the importance of aesthetics and beauty in the development of spirituality. The Signadou campus’ unique contribution to this story is evidenced by its art collection (listed above), and also by its origins. Specifically, Father Maurice Keating not only created the mosaics in the Blackfriars cloister, but painted copies of early Madonnas, paintings of St Dominic and other saints for the cloisters of Blackfriars. He also instructed Dominican students in the arts of mosaic and oils (“Blackfriars Priory” 1957: 11).

With their monumental design, the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings were perhaps referencing the arrival of the Dominican Order’s Generalizia and new Studium Generale amidst other important institutions of the new national capital. Nonetheless, the function of the Blackfriars and Signadou buildings and their appropriateness for religious life and educational pursuits was more important in the development process than creating outstanding architectural design. Different building forms result from different theological needs, and in the case of a Signadou and Blackfriars, their distinctive octagonal shape, centred around internal courtyards, had the effect of creating unity in community living appropriate for religious vocation (Moroney 2011). While the buildings are interesting, and embody certain aspects of modern 20th century architecture, they essentially follow traditional monastic design with cloisters for communing, studying, and taking exercise surrounding open areas that provide ample light and air.

In a recent paper exploring the functionality of Early Modern Portuguese cloisters, Rodrigues (2015: 17) observes the importance of cloisters and the garden spaces they enclose as representing the cornerstones of monastic observance. The quietness of cloister spaces evoked the eternal silence of God, and although sounds were heard, cloisters were *perceived as the necessary scenery to engage in mediation and contemplation, essential steps in the path towards salvation.*

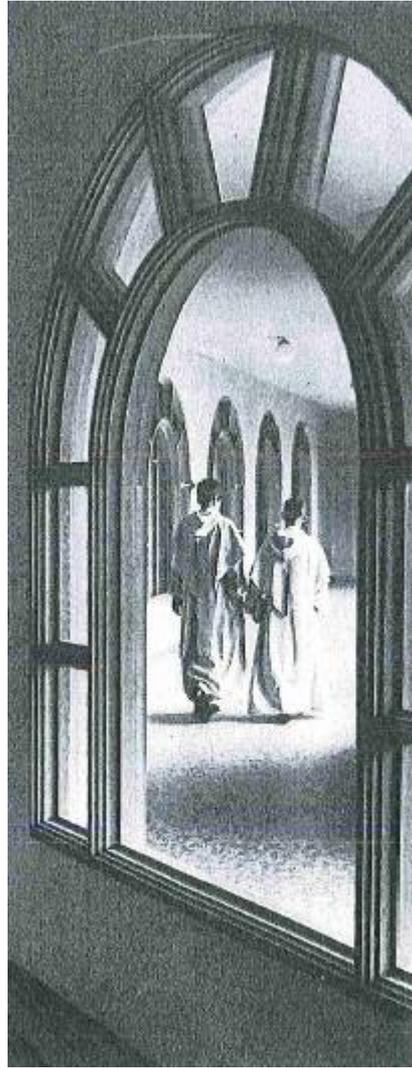


Image 26. The cloister – the cornerstone of monastic observance, evoking the eternal silence of God – in use at Blackfriars (“Blackfriars Priory” 1967”).

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) saw, for the first time in its 2000 year history, the Catholic Church attempt a study and understanding of itself (Vatican II, 2016). Although Apperly et al (1994) date the Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical style from 1960 onwards, it is important to note that the imperative for internal review had been building within the Catholic Church for some time prior to this, influenced by modernism, and social and technological change through (and before) the 1950s. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council was announced by Pope John XXIII at the beginning of 1959, less than three months after his election in late 1958.

While the Church’s internal study involved a more overt return to its roots in Scripture and other traditions, it also began to emphasize its humanity: the Church is in the world and not over and against the world. It shrugged off its fortress mentality, and strove to be more in touch and in dialogue with the world in terms of other Christian traditions, other faiths, the cultural, the political, and the technical milieu in which we all live (Vatican II: 2016).

Late Twentieth-Century Ecclesiastical (1960–) style saw the continuation and extension of post-war religious architecture principally for Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. There was a tendency to create new plan-shapes reflected the move away from past symbolic rituals with this style. A departure from medieval forms permitted freer forms of expression, but vertical emphasis persisted in this style, which was adopted Australia-wide (Apperly et al 1994: 231).

Both buildings incorporate vertical blue-stone detailing, and verticality is expressed in the inverted V shape of the window openings, which are reminiscent of the Gothic pointed arch, and the vertical emphasis of the window

openings at Signadou. Blackfriars, too, employs a vertical motif in its repetition of high window openings, although these finish in arches, as opposed to inverted Vs. The altar inside Signadou's chapel also reflects the ethos of the style, as it was moved forward after the Second Vatican Council to reflect liturgical changes, specifically, to ensure the priest was closer to the flock (Clarke 2013: 88).

Physical condition and integrity

Work on both buildings continues constantly, but despite the many modifications the essential character of the buildings remains. This includes courtyard gardens encompassed by buildings that open into gardens as well as to the street. In Signadou the cloister is no longer continuous, but the panels of coloured glass that were a feature of the original cloister remain, casting patterns of coloured light at different times of the day (Clarke 2013: 86).

The garden plantings in the courtyards of both buildings have been modified across the years. Some of the early trees planted at Blackfriars have been kept but the courtyard at Signadou has been modified to include smaller trees and a central rose garden, memorial plantings and plaques (Clarke 2013: 86).

Major changes have occurred to the inside of the Signadou building since its completion in 1963, such as expansion and alterations of teaching spaces and teaching offices, as well as major additions and alterations to the library. As noted above, the changes have not significantly altered the original character of the building, although the ground-floor cloister is no longer continuous.

Similarly, major refurbishments have altered the interior of Blackfriars building. Changes to the interior include construction of new lecture rooms, new offices, a cafe, new meeting rooms, an Indigenous unit, and a free-standing student centre (Clarke 2013). As with Signadou, these changes have not altered the original design or character of the Blackfriars building.

Notably, the cloister inside Blackfriars is still continuous as of 2017. The ground floor of the building can still be accessed as it was designed and built in the early 1960s. Many of the internal features – such as the wooden arches, have been well-cared for, and remain in excellent condition.

The campus grounds are planted primarily with Eucalypts and exotic tree species, including

- Oak trees (*Quercus*)
- Silver birch (*Betula pendula*)
- Conifers (*Pinophyta*)
- Golden elm (*Ulmus glabra*)
- Photinias (*Rosaceae*)
- Plum tree (*Prunus*)
- Rose bushes (*Rosaceae*)

While the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings reveal themselves as one approaches the Phillip Avenue intersection, it is difficult to read the campus from several vantage points. For example, mature landscaping and Holy Rosary Parish Church obscure the campus from the Phillip Avenue roundabout, the grounds of Dickson College, and St Margaret's Uniting Church. As of 2017, building works have commenced on a new student facilities building, which will be located between the Signadou and Blackfriars buildings.

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