

BOOK REVIEW

Armour of Light: The stained glass windows of St James' Church, Forest Lodge, those to whom they are dedicated and their families

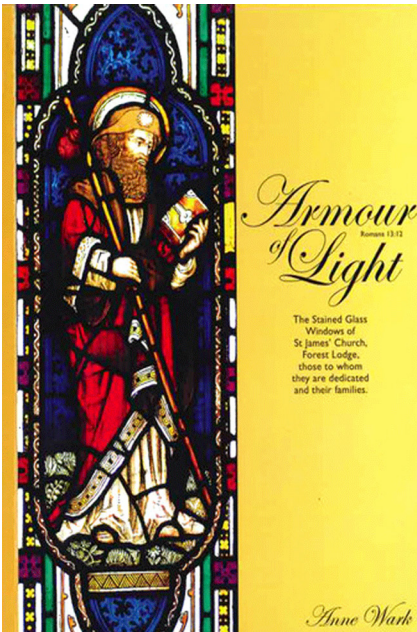
Author: Anne Wark

Publisher: Parish of St James, Forest Lodge 2010

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Paperback, 133 pages, \$20.00 from National Trust Shop

Book review by Max Solling*



On 1 September 1878 Archbishop Polding consecrated St James' Church, named after the apostle called from his fishing to follow Christ. Church building in Glebe made architects and builders rich, and in the 1880s all major Christian denominations, except the Baptists, had their own places of worship in Glebe. As the churches represented the largest voluntary grouping in colonial society they exercised a powerful pervasive influence on the conduct of life.

A sure sign of Catholic fidelity was the way they supported their schools – St James' (1880), St Ita's (1900) and St Scholastica's (1902) and strong networks were established around the church where they worshipped, educated their children and sought fellowship. An integral part of these

networks were the Good Samaritan Sisters and the Patrician Brothers. St James is a place where local people are baptised, married and mourned as they embark on their last journey; a place where the sense of family and local piety is given tangible form.

*Max Solling is the author of histories of Glebe and Leichhardt.

St James has been a thriving parish for more than 130 years, and its history was first explored by John Fletcher in 1977 and brought up to date by Michael Hogan in 2002.¹ Anne Wark's *Armour of Light* is a wonderful addition to these two works, shedding much light on the stained glass windows of St James and the people to whom the windows are dedicated.

In 1878 the church contained stained glass windows in the sanctuary in memory of James Doheny, John Morris, Flora Morris and John Young beside artistic depictions of St James and St John. The side windows were in leadlight with clear diamond shaped panes of glass. Over the next thirty years or so, these windows were replaced with beautifully wrought stained glass donated by individuals or families in memory of loved ones and reflecting the spirituality of the church of the day. They were constructed in Sydney by artisans John Falconer and Frederick Ashwin in partnership with John Radecki who became one of Ashwin's chief designers.

What do we know of the kind of parishioners who attended St James during the time these windows were added? The marriage register of St James reveals 450 marriages took place in the church between 1878 and 1897 with a strong representation of Irish-born brides and grooms. The largest number of these emigrants came from counties Clare, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Donegal, with Cavan, Kerry, Mayo, Meath, Tyrone and Kilkenny less common. Prominent among the occupations of St James grooms were labourers and cabmen together with innkeeper, carpenter and upholsterer, tending to support Cardinal Moran's observation in his massive 1895 history that Irish Catholics were concentrated among the landless, unskilled labouring class. Catholics retained a self-image of being drinkers according to Patrick O'Farrell but parishioners at Forest Lodge were proud of their 120 member Total Abstinence Association, formed in 1888; it met monthly to renew the pledge, listen to readings and sing songs.

Armour of Light restores the identity and character to people who left little written record of their lives, their original importance. In 1904, for example, a devoted wife donated a window in memory of her husband Carl Carlson, born in Sweden about 1837 and who came ashore in Sydney as a 25-year-old. Shortly after he married Irish girl Catherine Gallagher, neither able to sign their name, giving their assent with an 'X'. However during the 1860s literacy greatly improved with nearly two-thirds of both sexes being able to read and write. The energetic and entrepreneurial Carlson quickly learned the ways of the prevailing Anglo-Celtic culture, bought and sold town property and prospered in his new land. He helped establish the Scandinavian Seamen's Home in the Rocks and moved to 270 Glebe Road

in 1902, dying there two years later. A particularly poignant and beautiful window is dedicated to the Irish National Foresters' Benefit Society, a benevolent society with nationalist ideals, united by a common desire to assist members in hard times. Without the sustaining services of a welfare state, the Society offered a measure of protection to working families during periods of illness, unemployment and old age.

Armour of Light is a little gem of suburban history, a meticulously researched and insightful labour of love. It is complete with a Glebe map indicating where the people identified in the windows lived, a church floor plan, footnotes, bibliography and above all its beautifully illustrated stained glass windows, some of the church's richest treasures. The publishers are to be congratulated for producing such a handsome book.

Notes

- 1 John Fletcher with additional material by Michael Hogan, *St James' Parish, Forest Lodge: 125 years: 1877-2002*, Michael Hogan, Forest Lodge, 2002.

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When We Are Weak, Then We Are Strong: A History of the Marist Sisters in Australia 1907 – 1984

Author: Joan C McBride, sm
Publisher: Marist Sisters, 2006
ISBN: 9780646468075
Paperback, 196 pages, \$44.00

Reviewed by Robyn Dunlop*

Commissioned by the Marist Provincial of Australia and written by Joan McBride, sm, *When We Are Weak, Then We Are Strong* is a record of the presence and activities of the Marist Sisters in Australia in the twentieth century.

The book has been written for the “next generation” of Marist Sisters, in what is now the Asia-Pacific Region of the Order. Times have changed, as the name of the new Region indicates; Australia is not where the new

* Dr Robyn Dunlop is a historian and author of *Planted in Congenial Soil: The Diocesan Sisters of St Joseph, Lochinvar, 1883 – 1917*.