

# CATHEDRAL OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“A” QUEEN STREET

A Spirited Revival



**Owner:**  
*Titular RC Archbishop of Singapore*

**Architect:**  
*Architects 61 Pte Ltd*

**Engineer:**  
*ECAS Consultants Pte Ltd*

**Contractor:**  
*Shanghai Chong Kee Furniture &  
Construction Pte Ltd*

**Conservation Specialist:**  
*Studio Lapis*

*This national monument of historical interest in origins and architecture has been lovingly restored and returned for the appreciation and benefit of the congregation as well as the wider community.*

## **Sacred Grounds**

For over 170 years, the passage of time took its toll on the church, both structurally and aesthetically. In this restoration, the team opted for maximum retention to keep the layers of history while bringing the facilities up-to-date. With a conservation specialist, an archaeologist, a pipe organ restorer and a stained glass restorer on board, best practices were adopted to restore the inherent heritage value and to reveal the rich stories in the centuries-old site. Backed by detailed research and analysis, the results glow with many treasured revivals.

## **Referencing the Past**

The existing building fabric was reinforced with fibre-reinforced polymer wrapping. For the East portico which unexpectedly collapsed, a steel structure clad with brickwork to meet current code, brought back the original profile. Elaborate underpinning works preceded reconstruction of the ground floor slab. The team also made use of the opportunity to conceal new M&E services under the slab which allow air-conditioning units to be neatly hidden behind perimeter cabinets.

The Cathedral's original chequerboard pattern floor seen in historic



*Main entrance of the Cathedral facing Queen Street*

photographs was reinstated. A lighter colour scheme that took reference from the original was adopted after careful examination of the multiple layers of paint coating. The Cathedral's stained glass windows, installed in the early 1900s, were carefully documented before dismantling for restoration at an off-site studio. Missing glass pieces from the windows were masterfully

replicated and additional clear glass panels were installed behind the windows for protection.

## **Celebration of Heritage**

The glass panels of the pre-war mild-steel pivoted windows were also systematically tagged before removal for restoration. Of note is that the glass panels have different shades of green as a result of sporadic replacements over the years. The colour variation was kept and broken panels replaced with like-for-like pieces. The patchwork of shades gave the Cathedral a unique light quality while acknowledging the works of previous generations. Clear glass panels were also cleverly inserted into the openings between the open pivoted panels so that natural light continue to stream into the newly air-conditioned interior.

More than a sacred historical landmark, the Cathedral houses the oldest pipe organ in Singapore. This antiquated musical rarity, installed in 1912, was delicately dismantled and brought off-site for restoration. It continues to be instrumental in preserving the Cathedral's strong heritage of pipe organ music.



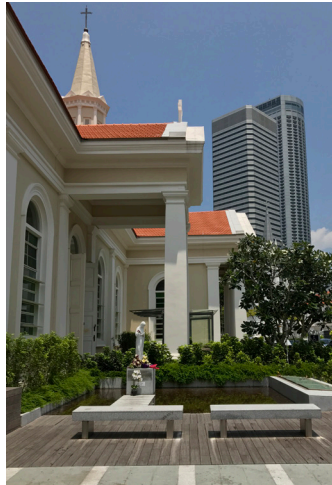
*View of the nave from the choir loft*



*Pipe organ*



*Steeple and the reinstated East portico*



*Sensitive treatment to the landscape*



*Stained glass panel at the North transept*



*19th century bell in the steeple restored*



*Statue at the main entrance*



*Original mild steel pivoted window with green glass*



*Air-conditioning units sensitively hidden behind cabinets*



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## Rising Again

Described as a rare intact example of an Edwardian-style residential building, the Rectory displays a classic Edwardian architectural feature of alternating bands of red brickwork and white plaster, also known as “blood and bandage”. Upon discovering that the colours had been reversed, the team painstakingly removed the white paint over the brickwork and the red paint over the plaster to reinstate its original finish.



*Front facade of the Rectory*

## Beyond the Walls

Beyond brick and mortar, the church’s compound was also refreshed with thoughtfully curated landscaping works. The biblical-themed gardens provide spaces for prayer and quiet contemplation. The open areas double up as spaces for special events including secular ones. This has seen more people enjoying the fruits of the restoration.

The construction of a new annex and a new basement have yielded additional space for the church to grow. A heritage gallery has been

incorporated into the new annex. It tells the history of the church and showcases artefacts in the time capsule that was uncovered together with the church’s foundation stone. A heritage ministry was also set up to enhance its outreach efforts through publications, onsite information boards and a docent programme. The Cathedral is well known for its pipe organ music. To safeguard this intangible heritage, the Cathedral

has also introduced initiatives such as the Organ Scholarship Programme for people who are interested to serve as organists.

## Communal Space

The Cathedral has been opening its doors to people from all walks of life, regardless of race or religion. Its premises and programmes contribute to bringing diverse communities together. Indeed, the three-year major restoration project has successfully revived the Cathedral’s position as a heritage asset and a beacon of the community for generations to come.



*"Blood and bandage" facade reinstated*



*Rear entrance of the Rectory*



*Turret of the Rectory*



*Original encaustic floor tiles in the Rectory*



*Exposed brickwork showing the line of the Cathedral's extension in 1888*



*Foundation stone of the church*



*Information board installed around the compound*



*Heritage gallery in the new annex*



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## Humble Beginnings

The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd began its journey in 1832 with services held in the house of Denis McSwiney. In 1833, a simple wood and attap chapel was built on the site of the present-day Singapore Art Museum. Over the years, as the congregation grew, the present site was secured to build a larger church.

The goal was to create a structure which was cost-efficient, could be easily maintained and better adapted to Singapore’s climate – all without compromising on grandeur. A simple

Neo-Classical design with timber louvred windows and a cruciform plan was selected. The building was completed with a steeple and had Tuscan columns supporting the roof.

## Genesis

The inspiration for the name of the church came from a letter written by Father Laurent Imbert, the first Catholic priest to be sent to Singapore on a mission by his bishop. Arriving in 1821, he noted that there were about a dozen Catholics living on the island. He later went on to serve in Korea as bishop during a time where Christians faced severe persecution by the authorities. In 1839, he was captured and together with two other priests, they gave themselves up believing that it would save the Korean converts. Father Imbert wrote, “In desperate circumstances, the good shepherd lays down



*Artifacts from the time capsule unearthed*

his life for his sheep.” They were beheaded and news of their martyrdom reached Singapore which resulted in the decision to dedicate the church to the Good Shepherd.

The church’s foundation stone was laid in 1843 by a merchant, John Connolly. Four years later, the Church of the Good Shepherd was blessed and officiated by Father Jean-Marie Beurel.

## Living History

By the 1880s, the congregation had once again outgrown the church, setting into motion another extension exercise. The church was

elevated to the status of Cathedral in 1888 and consecrated in 1897. Over the years, improvements were made to the Cathedral like the installation of cast iron gates and railings around the compound in 1908 and the addition of the Rectory in 1911 by Father Charles Benedict Nain as a residence for the Cathedral’s priests. During World War Two, the church was used as a place of refuge and an emergency hospital. It is believed that the building, like many of the other civic buildings in the area at that time, was painted in grey ‘camouflage’ paint so that it would not be easily seen from the air.

On 6 July 1973, because of its social, historic, cultural and architectural significance, the Cathedral was given statutory recognition as a national monument. Today, it continues its legacy as a centre for peace and refuge in the city.

*Singapore, Thursday, 3rd June, 1847.*

The New Catholic Church will be opened for Divine Service on Sunday next. If the Rt. Revd Dr BOUCHO should arrive before that time the Church will be consecrated, otherwise it will be solemnly blessed by the Revd Mr J. M. BEUREL. In either case the service will begin at 7 o'clock A. M. This new structure forms a prominent and ornamental feature in the view of Singapore, and it cannot but be gratifying to the Roman Catholic community to possess such a very neat place of worship.

Newspaper clipping from *The Free Press*, announcing the opening of the church in 1847



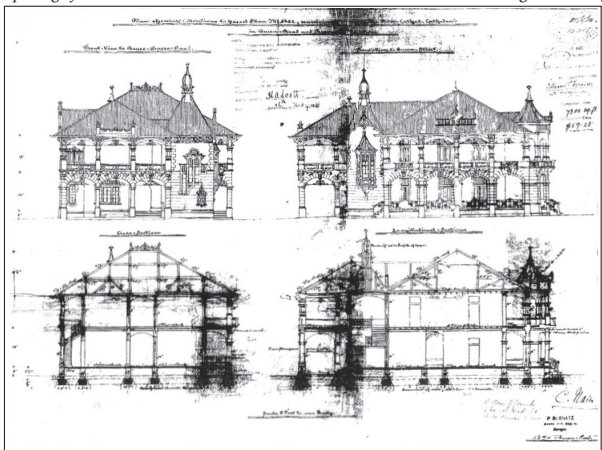
Vol. 1 of the Cathedral's Baptismal Registers dating from 1832



St Laurent Imbert



Relic of St Laurent Imbert at the North transept



Original plan of the Rectory by Father Nain



Early 20th century view of the Cathedral and Rectory along Queen Street



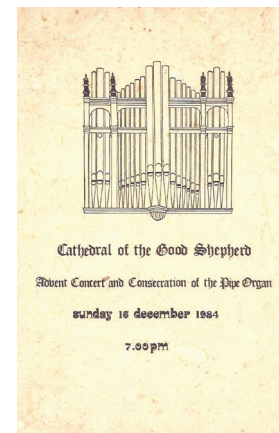
Father Jean-Marie Beurel



Father Charles Benedict Nain,  
Architect of the Rectory



Original Lady Chapel at the North transept



Organ concert programme, 1984