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MELBOURNE'S HISTORIC HOMES

No. 11. Bishopscourt and its Residents

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Locked away from the rest of the world behind high walls, Bishopscourt stands in two acres of grounds in Clarendon-street, East Melbourne. It has since 1853 housed every Anglican Bishop and Archbishop of Melbourne. A charming old house, it has stood serenely, calmly through all the changes that time has wrought in this once aristocratic quarter. There is an old world air about the house that is strengthened by the spacious grounds, and trim kept, yet rambling, gardens which have that unordered orderliness that spells age in a garden.

Approached from the wide iron gates it bears an air of peaceful charm, this home of bishops. Two-storied, with pillared, arched loggia, the first thing that strikes the visitor is the mixture of architectural style and building material. One portion, built of bluestone, is in the Italian style; the other, an extensive wing, built in red brick, is in the Queen Anne style. But there, is no aesthetic clash about this mixed style and material. Actually they combine to make a picturesque whole, made even more charming by the square tower, the creeper covered walls and the cloistered loggia. Broad sweep of lawn, dotted with trees and embroidered with flower beds, give appearance of greater size to the house, add to its picturesque charm and make more insistent its ecclesiastic quiet.

The first Anglican Bishop of Melbourne was the Right Rev. Dr. Charles Perry. A son of an eminent ship builder at Blackwall, who was the originator of the East India docks, he was consecrated Bishop of Melbourne in 1846, and arrived at Williamstown in the ship Stag on 23rd January, 1847. For a few days he and his talented wife lived at the Southern Cross Hotel in Bourke-street west, the only family hotel in Melbourne at the time, and highly esteemed as such. Then he went into residence in a small cottage on Mr. Superintendent Latrobe's property at Latrobe. Here he lived until Bishopscourt was built. Incidentally Mr. Latrobe's and Bishop Perry's cottages were the only two residences in Jolimont in those days, Latrobe's still stands; the other has gone long since. Bishop Perry brought with him a promise of the Secretary of State for the Colonies of a grant for an Episcopal residence, £2000 for its cost and a stipend of £500 a year. In 1848 he accepted a grant of two acres within the city boundaries, preferring this to five acres beyond the boundaries because of its convenience to the settlement. The sum of £2000 necessary for the building of Bishopscourt was appropriated from the proceeds of church reserves in the "middle district," New South Wales. Bishop Perry's reasons for accepting the smaller site were characteristic of the man. Writing from his primitive cottage at Jolimont, he said: — "In the enumeration of my duties and employments at Melbourne I may refer to the cultivation, upon Christian principles, of such intercourse with residents in the city and with the settlers who are in the habit of visiting it as may, with God's blessing, promote mutual friendliness and good feeling among themselves, and tend to give a more refined and intellectual tone to general society. I may seem to some perhaps to assume too much in supposing that I can thus produce any sensible effect upon the character and manners of the people, but it must be remembered that a bishop in a young community like this, although destitute of all worldly rank, and living in a perfectly simple and unostentatious manner, is even more than his brethren at home in 'a city set on a hill' and may, I am persuaded, with God's help exercise a very powerful influence in moulding the minds and tastes of those around him. It must be recollected also that the office of a bishop

requires him to exercise hospitality, and besides the direct ministry of the Word and the example of a holy life, there is scarcely any means more conducive than this to the spiritual wellbeing of the people over whom he is placed. My conviction of the truth of this had made me often regret the smallness of our present cottage. which allows me to see only a very few friends at a time, and prevents us accommodating any one for the night. . . . I console myself with reflection that if we be permitted to see the completion of the proposed residence, and to take possession of it, we may hope to be able to exercise the duty of hospitality."

Five years were to pass before Bishops court was completed. There were delays and distractions, not the least being the gold discovery which caused shortage of labor and tremendous increase in labor costs. Bishop Perry, who had taken a keen personal interest in the construction of the house, particularly in the provision for guests, tried to hasten the work by purchasing a cart for £25 for hauling the stones from Pentridge. The cart broke down on its first trip. Then Mr. Latrobe's cart was borrowed, but it too broke down. Then followed a period of bargaining with the owner of a dray, who demanded £5 a day for the work, but eventually was beaten down to £3 a day. Bishops court, when it was entered upon by Bishop Perry, was only the present bluestone portion, and a few kitchens and other outhouses, which are now built over by the red-brick wing. Here he lived until 28th April, 1874, when he returned to England. Apart from the building of Bishops court, in itself notable, Bishop Perry had done fine service in Victoria. When he arrived there were only three Anglican clergy in the colony. During his episcopate, he stimulated the building of more than 300 churches in the diocese. He did not resign the see until 1876, and the following year he was appointed chaplain to the order of St. Michael and St. George, and prebendary and canon of Llandaff. He retired in 1889, and died two years later.

The second resident of Bishops court was Bishop Moorhouse, one of the most famous churchmen Australia has known. James Moorhouse was a son of a Sheffield master cutler. Graduating from Cambridge he was ordained deacon in 1853. Consecrated Bishop of Melbourne in 1876, he arrived here in 1877. Bishops court under his episcopate became the centre for the discussion of many public questions, notably education and irrigation, in the advocacy of which he took a strong part. The cause of federation was also fought by him, and it was largely due to his efforts that the present St. Paul's Cathedral was built. The Moorhouse tower, just completed, commemorates his work. Broadminded and eloquent, he attracted leading public men of all denominations, and his outspoken views made him a definite leader in public affairs. In 1880 he was appointed chancellor of the University, in whose service he had done much fine work. Five years later he was offered by Lord Salisbury the see of Manchester, just made vacant by the death of James Fraser, another great bishop. In Manchester Moorhouse did wonderful work in the industrial areas. In 1903, worn out by his labors, he resigned the see and lived in retirement until his death in 1915.

Bishop Field Flowers Goe was the third resident of Bishops court. 1886 to 1901, and then came Bishop Henry Lowther Clarke, who arrived in March 1903, was created Archbishop in 1905, and as such administered the see until 1920. The following year came Archbishop Lees, and on his death three years ago Archbishop Head became the sixth resident of Bishops court. It was during the episcopate of Archbishop Clarke that the Queen Anne wing was added to Bishops court. For some years before 1903 the old portion of the house had been falling into disrepair. It was whilst they were awaiting the arrival of Bishop Clarke and his family in 1903 that the diocesan authorities decided to remodel and add to the house. The

architect of the wing was Walter Butler, and the builder Frederick Nixon. The old kitchens were pulled down, and in the new wing were built dining room, kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. Attached was the chapel, one of the most interesting features of the present house. The building operations were in progress when Bishop Clarke arrived, and until they were completed he and his family lived in a house in Albert-street, near the Presbyterian Ladies' College.

In the furnishing of the chapel, in which the Archbishop's household worships, all the Bishops and Archbishops of Melbourne, with the exception of Bishop Perry, have played a part. Bishop Moorhouse gave the marble steps and portion of the floor. Bishop Clarke gave the reading desk and chair, furnishings for the Holy table and for Holy Communion, Bible and prayer books. Bishop Goe gave the stained glass windows in memory of his wife, and Archbishop Lees gave the chapel bell and bracket, two bookshelves, blue dorsal curtain, kneelers and office books. The chapel, consecrated in the name of St. John, was opened on Friday, 24th June, 1904 by Bishop Clarke.

The interior of Bishops court is as charming and comfortable as the exterior suggests. Over all its spacious comfort breathes the hope of Bishop Perry, its creator, that it would spell hospitality "Dulce Domum" is the inscription on a copper panel on the staircase. Originally this panel was part of Bishop Perry's diningroom mantelpiece. In the hall a tall, old grandfather clock ticks sonorously. Around the walls are hung portraits of all the Bishops and Archbishops of Melbourne. Beneath each picture is a chair, or seat, each one emblazoned with the name and the coat of arms of the bishop who presented it to help furnish this hall. This is a charming custom whose origin is obscure. A great deal of the furniture belongs to the diocese, having been purchased mainly from the bishops who have resided there.

There are two interesting features in the fine old gardens. One is the old, gnarled gum tree which stands like a protector before the entrance to the house. Corroborree Gum this old giant is named. Services were held under its spreading shade by Bishop Perry before the first stone of Bishops court was laid. Years— ay, how many years ?— before the white man came and turned this delightful spot into a bishop's residence the aborigines held their corroborrees there. The second interesting feature is the grave of Bishop Moorhouse's favourite bull dog, Tim. A tiny headstone marks his last resting place. Near by is the grave of a little terrier that was owned by Archbishop Lees. Before long a headstone will mark his resting place.

All the residents of Bishops court have loved their home. There are many signs of this in the little touches of furnishing, in the obvious pride they had in the building and the equipping of the tiny chapel, and in the care they took with the planning and the keeping of the garden. It is a charming old place that has worthily housed worthy people.