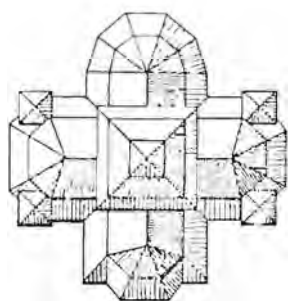


# A SHORT TRIBUTE TO CANON EDGAR ROSE



Roof plan of St. Patrick's.

(Photo. Bierman).

D.A. van der Bank

A collection of glass negatives of photographs taken of St Patrick's Anglican Mission and Church were donated to the National Museum by Miss Margaret Rose. This necessitated some research on the subject of the church. Although the research centered on St Patrick's Church, my interest was aroused by her father, the architect and builder of the church, Canon Edgar Rose, a remarkable and talented man, virtually unremembered in Bloemfontein today.

Edgar Rose (1867-1946) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, and was apprentice to Edward Thornton, a chemist of Leamington, Warwickshire. He came to South Africa in 1890 and worked in Kimberley as an assistant to a chemist. Here he first met Bishop Gaul who persuaded him to run a Native mission in his spare time, which led him to become a missionary. Several years later he was able to pay his passage to England and finance himself through three years training at St Augustine's, Canterbury. On his return to South Africa he worked for two years at Thaba Nchu under Rev Crosthwaite. During this period he designed St Luke's Church, probably the first of the more than thirty churches he designed. Among his churches is the church in the Black township of Winburg and the little stone church of the leper settlement outside Maseru. In 1898 the Bishop had him transferred to Waaihoek, at that time one of Bloemfontein's Black townships, situated in the vicinity of the present day Harvey Road and Watkey Street. On his arrival there he found a Mission consisting of 800 communicants, three out-stations, five helpers and a school of 64 children. Fourteen years later there were 3 000 communicants and 35 out-stations, some of them in the Black townships of small towns, but the majority on farms.



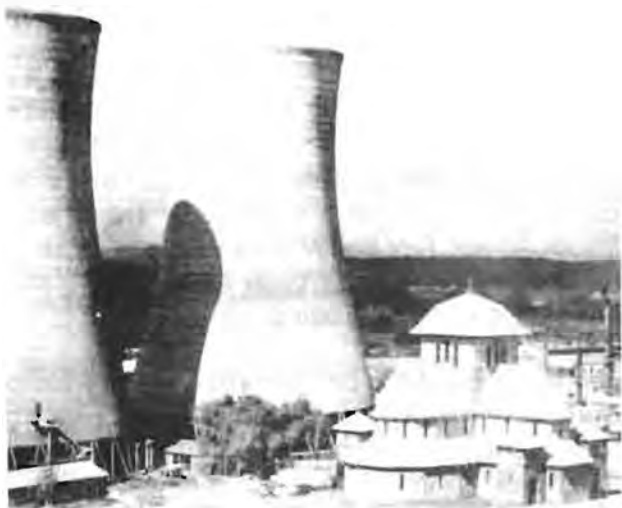
*Canon Edgar Rose (1867-1946)*

In April 1912 Rev Rose married Miss Lucy Paddison (1877-1966), who had learnt woodcarving at Cheltenham College under the tuition of Gilbert Bayes of London and Joseph Philips of Liverpool — skills which she put to good use at the Mission. She carried on with her work until she was nearly eighty years of age and some of her memorial plates in copper and wood can still be seen in a number of churches in South Africa. Rev and Mrs Rose used to visit the outstations on a motor cycle and pillion — their only shelter at night being a small tent.

At a meeting of the congregation of the Mission Church in 1903 it was decided that a new and bigger church was needed. After several years the Black congregation had managed to raise £830 (R1 660) and Rev Rose decided that it was enough to begin with. Further sums were donated by supporters in England. The estimate given by a building contractor to build the church originally designed by Rev Rose was £16 000



*Rev. Rose and his workmen in front of the partially completed church. Note the crossbars on the beams instead of scaffolding.*



*St Patrick's, dwarfed by the twin cooling towers of the power station, shortly before it was demolished in 1954.*

(R32 000), a sum totally beyond the means of the Mission. Although Rev Rose never had a lesson in either drawing or architecture he decided, in view of his previous experience in designing churches, to undertake the work himself with the help of five carpenters, a mason and five or six assistants. The foundation stone of the new church was laid on Sunday, September 27th, 1908 by the Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony, Abraham Fischer. The completion of the building took no less than fifteen years because of the lack of funds, the First World War and the flu epidemic of 1918. In *The Barolong*, an occasional paper of the Mission, Rose commented: "Progress was held up by the European war. Subscriptions stopped, costs went up to a towering height, and the Director [Rose] apparently was the only one who lived on in the hope of the ultimate accomplishment of the scheme". However, his tenacity was rewarded and on Ascension Day, 10 May 1923, the church was consecrated by Bishop Carey. Six years later Canon and Mrs Rose and their family of three children left Bloemfontein for Natal.


It is ironic that this interesting and unusual church, the completion of which took so many years, was destined to be in use for only a little more than thirty years. The church was demolished in 1954 to make way for the water cooling towers of the power station.

The plan of the church was in the form of a Greek cross. The choir and nave and the transepts were 15 metres wide and 32,6 metres and 31 metres long respectively. The walls were built of brick with a stone foundation. Immensely tall pillars were needed to support the tower which was 30 metres high. Four beams of Oregon pine were bolted together, those in the body of the church forming single lengths of 13,7 metres each while in the tower two such lengths had to be spliced and bolted together. Since scaffolding would have cost too much, the tower was built from the inside. The pillars were used as ladders, crossbars being nailed to them. As the superstructure had to be light to be supported by the wooden pillars, double slabs of asbestos were used. Because no scaffolding was used the workmen on the roof had to descend by means of a rope. The building was completed without a single accident.

The most significant feature of the church was the corrugated-iron roof with more than fifty



*The interior of the church*

different faceted levels. Désirée Picton-Seymour referred to it as, "a towered and spired edifice on a grand scale, of necessity constructed of wood and corrugated iron; the angular corrugated-iron roof was a masterpiece of utility designing, each facet of striped corrugations catching the light with different intensity. With these uncompromising materials, in an original and ingenious way Rose achieved a most interesting version of the Gothic style". While B.E. Bierman likened the effect of the roof to that of a cut diamond. "Nes 'n geslypte diamant vertoon die wentelende vlakke van Sint Patricks se sinkplaatdakke. Intuitief het die ontwerper die moontlikhede van 'n samespel tussen sy boustof en die Vrystaatse lig aangevoel en uitgebuit. Met reg kan hierdie gebou die Parthenon van die sinkplaatstyl genoem word". No mean achievement for an unknown missionary! 

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

BIERMAN, B E 1955 *Boukuns in Suid-Afrika: 'n beknopte oorsig van ons boustyle en bouwyse* Cape Town.

*Die Volksblad*, 20 April 1982

PICTON-SEYMOUR, D. 1977 *Victorian buildings in South Africa* Cape Town

ROSE, M E 1985 Written information supplied to the National Museum

*The Barolong, an occasional paper of English Church Mission in the South Diocese of Bloemfontein*, July 1912, August 1914, April 1916, June 1923

*The Friend*, 8 June 1929, 22 January 1954.



*St Patrick's Church, completed in 1923, the crowning achievement of the more than thirty churches designed by Canon Rose.*