

Vacy Hall Guest House Toowoomba

The last work of one of Toowoomba's leading Architects - James Marks



James Marks was born in Yeovil, Somerset, England, the son of Paul Marks. He began working life in 1850 for building contractors, Joseph and Charles Rigby of Westminster as an office boy and storekeeper for the firm's works at Bristol.

After 1852 he began work as a carpenter for the same firm. Until 1859, Marks worked for this and other building firms on similar jobs but having taught himself construction, joinery and drawing in the meantime, he was eager to upgrade his constructional skills.

James Marks' first appointment upon his arrival in Queensland in 1866 was as a builder and architect in Dalby engaged on "sundry works" until 1868 when he was contracted to carry out extensive building operations on the Darling Downs properties of Davenport and Fisher.

Among these buildings are the impressive farm buildings at Headington Hill. Marks was for a time in 1874 contractor for the Dalby Police Barracks and then moved to Toowoomba where he and his elder son Harry set about becoming a dominant force in architecture for more than half a century.

He became a member of the Toowoomba sawmilling firm of Filshie Broadfoot and Co. thereby maintaining his practical interest in the building trade. Marks showed political interest also, by standing as a candidate for the East Ward in the 1896 municipal elections and was a foundation member of the Pioneer Club.

Among his many achievements, Marks designed several churches, the most notable being St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral for which he won a design competition in 1884. He also won another competition for the design of the Toowoomba Public Baths in 1894.

James Marks' impact on the city of Toowoomba has been considerable and can still be seen today in buildings such as:

- St Matthew's Church of England Drayton;
- "Weetwood" for William Schofield, Tor street;
- additions to Toowoomba Grammar School;
- "Redlands" for Edmund Wilcox (later Concordia College);
- the grandstand at Clifford Park racecourse,
- Beirne's Chambers, Margaret street;
- Warby's (later Tattersall's) horse bazaar, Margaret street;
- St Patrick's Cathedral and St Stephen's Presbyterian Church.

And, as James Marks & Son from 1892:

- nurses quarters at the Toowoomba Hospital;
- "Smithfield" for James Taylor, Panda street;
- additions to St Denis' Private Hospital (now 4AK building);
- "Spreydon" for Robert Filshie, cnr Rome and Warra streets; and...
- "Vacy Hall" for Gilbert Gostwyck Cory, Russell Street in 1899.

Vacy Hall was the last building James Marks worked on prior to his retirement.

James Marks passed away on 29 October, 1915 in Toowoomba; he was predeceased in 1913 by his wife Elizabeth Marsh.

Sources:

Watson, Donald "Queensland Architects of the 19th Century" Brisbane: Qld Museum, c1994.