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Amen to that: Broadway's famous billboard battle could be resurrected



Before the fire ... Mr Powell at the church.

Photo: *Rick Stevens*

Jano Gibson Urban Affairs Reporter
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RESTING on an upturned beer keg in the cellar of the Broadway Hotel, the publican, Arthur Elliot, formulated his response.

Across the busy road, the Reverend Robert Forsyth of St Barnabas Anglican Church had just put a new message on the church's public signboard. It read: "God has rights too."

Mr Elliot, a former pugilist, found himself a large piece of card and a signwriter's brush. "I replied: 'Jeff Fenech has a good right too.' "

The publican is long gone and the rector has since become the Bishop of South Sydney, but their famous signboard battle, which ran from 1985 to 1997, could soon be resurrected.

The 151-year-old church, which was destroyed by fire three years ago, has lodged an application for a \$12.7 million redevelopment of the site.

As well as a contemporary church featuring a wave-shaped roof, a new signboard in honour of the pair's famous banter is planned.

"Although the church is much more than its signs, the signs have been for many people the thing that made it stand out as a church," Bishop Forsyth said. "I would love to see the new Barneys have a new discussion with Sydney in some way. I don't want its greatest days for the sign to be in the past when I was there."

Luke Ellis, the licensee of a cafe and bar that operates out of the old Broadway Hotel, said he would be happy to keep the tradition of a good-humoured war of words alive.

"We do have boards and stuff to put specials on, so we could make one of the boards a permanent board for [our responses to the church's messages]," Mr Ellis said.

The church's rector, the Reverend Ian Powell, said about \$5 million still had to be raised for the redevelopment. However, he was hopeful construction would begin by the end of the year.

"We are confident that God will move people to give, but He will need to do a lot of moving of people. We will need some minor and major miracles," he said.

Mr Elliot, 72, who now lives on the Gold Coast and runs a Neighbourhood Watch program, said he would be thrilled if the witty exchanges were to continue.

"It gave a message to the people and the community, not just around Chippendale and Ultimo, but people who travelled into the city and out of the city every day, from as far as Parramatta."

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