17. Christ Church Cathedral Precinct

This precinct is highly valued by the community for a range of social, historic and architectural reasons. It consists of the Christ Church Cathedral (completed in 1977), the adjacent Cyclone Tracy ruins of the original Christ Church (1902), and the associated memorial gate (1944) facing Smith Street.

The church was constructed in 1902, consecrated by the Bishop of Carpentaria and named Christ Church on 2 November of that year. A vestry and rectory were added in 1917.

In 1942, it was used as the Garrison Church for the armed services and escaped significant damage during bombing raids but was looted and vandalised. The portico and memorial gate, constructed by the RAN, were added in 1944 using stone from the bombed post office. The Navy returned the church to the diocese in 1946.

In 1968, the church became a cathedral. Cyclone Tracy destroyed all but the front wall and portico of the cathedral, and these were incorporated into the new cathedral, constructed in 1976. The new Christ Church Cathedral was consecrated on 13 March 1977, with the Archbishop of Canterbury in attendance.

The new cathedral has been recognised for its architectural excellence and is a venue for important community events.
History

In August 1900 the Diocese of Carpentaria came into existence and included the Northern Territory, Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands. It was the largest Anglican Diocese in the world. Bishop Gilbert White was consecrated as the first Bishop and visited Palmerston for the first time in 1901. It was decided that land should be purchased to build a church.

A committee was established to raise funds for the purchase of the land, and for the stipend for a rector. In the meantime, it was decided that lay preachers would hold services in the Town Hall.

In December 1901 the Rev HP Gocher was appointed as the first Rector of the Parish of Palmerston. After his first service, a general meeting was held and it was decided to build a small church to seat 100 people. It was designed by A Andrew and featured stone walls with an iron roof. Victor Voules Brown signed a contract to build the church for £435 on 4 June 1902. The foundation stone was laid on 12 July 1902:

In the absence of the Bishop and the Rev. Mr. Gocher, we understand that Mr. Justice Dashwood has consented to perform the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the new Church of England building about to the erected in Smith-street. The ceremony will take place at 5 p.m. to-morrow (Saturday) afternoon.¹

Dashwood performed the ceremonial function (see newspaper account in Further Reading) but was required to revisit the site the following day because it was vandalised sometime on Sunday. The vandal was apparently after the contents of a bottle buried beneath the foundation stone and the coins scattered over the top of it. To render it more secure, flanking stones were added at either end². Alas, that was insufficient because the vandal returned for a second attempt that night. On this occasion, the ‘sacrilegious marauders’ emptied the bottle of its paper contents, presumably thinking the bottle contained money. In fact, it contained a copy of the local paper, a copy of the Bishop’s first annual report and a card dedicated to ‘the glory of God’. The stone was once again secured³ and appears to have been left alone after that time.

The first service was held on 26 October, and the church was consecrated by the Bishop of Carpentaria on 2 November 1902 when it was named Christ Church. During this service, a ‘necessary declaration’ was made that the ‘building was free from debt’⁴.

Christ Church Darwin NT: An illustrated history from the days of settlement⁵ noted that the church was intended as a ‘Lady Chapel’ for a larger cathedral, but this project never eventuated.

A vestry was added to the rear of the Church and in 1917 a rectory was built. In 1918, brass memorial plaques were placed on the walls of the Church in the memory of CLH Herbert

¹ Northern Territory Times & Gazette, 11 July 1902, p 3
² NT Times and Gazette, 18 July 1902, p 3.
³ Ibid.
⁴ NT Times and Gazette, 7 November 1902, p 3.
⁵ Published by the Christ Church Rectory.
(son of the former Government Resident Justice Herbert), and SJ Lauder, both of whom died in the Great War of 1914-18.

With war clouds looming in the 1930s, it was decided to defer the construction of a new church amid rumours that the Naval Authorities intended to requisition the land in front of the church.

In early 1942, it began to be used as the Garrison Church for the armed services based in Darwin. With invasion apparently imminent, all church records and valuables were piled in a truck and taken to safety in Alice Springs; slit trenches were dug in the grounds of the church. On 19 February 1942, the Japanese bombed Darwin. The church escaped serious damage but had windows blown out and suffered shrapnel damage to the roof and walls. The rectory and church were later looted and vandalised. In the aftermath of the bombing, the rectory was used as a sick bay and the Navy, with the help of the other services, repaired the damage to the church and rectory.

The portico, designed to complement the original design of the church, was built in 1944 by the Royal Australian Navy as a memorial to those who died on active service in the Territory during World War II. Stone from the Post Office, which suffered a direct bomb hit, was used to keep this addition in sympathy with the rest of the building.

The memorial gate was built in 1944 and rebuilt in 1965. It is symbolic of efforts made by members of the armed forces and the wider community to remember the events of World War II.

In 1946, after some controversy, the church buildings were handed back to the Anglican Church by the Navy.

In the late 1950s a Parish Hall was erected adjacent to the church. The building was relocated from Parap where it had been used as a recreation hall by the armed forces.

The 1960s was an era of expansion and growth for both Darwin as a whole and the Anglican Church. In 1968 the Northern Territory, previously part of the Diocese of Carpentaria, was created as a separate Diocese and Christ Church became the Cathedral church. Bishop Ken Mason became the first Bishop.

Cyclone Tracy destroyed all but a portion of the front wall and the portico. At a meeting of the Christ Church Building Committee of 24 July 1975 it was decided to retain the old portico and wall. Preliminary sketches were presented to the Committee on 8 August 1975. It was felt that the architects—Wilkins Klemm and Morrison—were ‘right on track’. In 1976 a new cathedral was constructed and stone from the original church was incorporated into the front wall. The portico was stabilised as a free-standing element, and was incorporated into the cathedral complex as a memorial to the World War II and Cyclone Tracy.

Christ Church Cathedral was consecrated on 13 March 1977 in a crowded ceremony attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The cathedral is symbolic of the determination to rebuild after Cyclone Tracy and is a good example of the types of church designs produced in Australia in the 1970s as a result of the Movement for Liturgical Change within the Anglican Church, which began in the late 1960s. This movement promoted greater informality and functional flexibility.
in the design of churches. The new cathedral in Darwin was specifically designed to allow not only religious services, but concerts and other functions. Furniture and fittings were deliberately not fixed in place. The white concrete block building adjacent to the cathedral proper was built at the same time as the cathedral, with a second storey added in later years.

The new cathedral has been recognised for its individual architectural excellence. It serves a continuing role as the major church for the Anglican congregation in the Northern Territory, and has broader social significance as a place of quiet refuge and a venue for important community events such as weddings and funerals.

Conservation work was carried out on the ruins in 2002-03, with funds from the NT Heritage Grants Programme.
Laying the Foundation Stone.

Fully sixty ladies and gentlemen and a goodly number of the smaller fry, assembled on the allotment in Smith-st., at 5.30 p.m. on Saturday afternoon, to witness the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the first Church of England to be erected in the Northern Territory. A rough derrick, with chain tackle, was placed at the north-west corner of the ground plan, to which was secured the foundation stone all ready for hoisting into its place—a block of stone about 30 x 18 x 6, bearing the following inscription:

LAID BY

MR. JUSTICE DASHWOOD

JULY, A.D. 1902.

first engraved upon the flat outer surface of the stone and subsequently painted in black. In the background Mr. W. J. Barnes was to be observed with his camera, and, we believe, he succeeded in obtaining a very good snapshot of the assembled group.

Mr. Justice Dashwood, in addressing himself to his task, said they were met together that afternoon to lay the foundation stone of the church which was to be erected in connection with the Church of England in this town. As the majority of those present knew, the Church of England service had for years past been conducted in connection with the local Wesleyan Church, and during this period their wants had been satisfactorily met by the ministrations in that church. But some time ago, for various reasons, it was considered that the time had arrived when some action should be taken in bringing about the establishment of a Church of their own. The idea was immediately taken up with a great deal of enthusiasm, and the result was that definite steps were taken to carry out what might, perhaps—considering the number of Anglicans resident in the Territory—have been done long before. Just about this time the Church in the N.T. was under the control of the Bishop of Adelaide, but it was subsequently arranged that it should form part of Diocese of Carpentaria, and some time ago Dr. White, Bishop of Carpentaria, had visited Port Darwin and held initial services. From that time onwards the matter had been taken in hand most enthusiastically by several good men and women; the appeal to the community had been met in a most gratifying manner; and by means of a bazaar and in other ways—not forgetting liberal assistance forthcoming from outside—enough money had been raised in a surprisingly short space of time to enable them to draw up plans and call tenders for the erection of a church of their own. There had been no question from the beginning of the movement as to the strong feeling which existed that the Church of England should be established and that they should have a minister of their own. Although many of them may have had some doubts as to the wisdom of the step (himself among the number), yet the counsels of the more sanguine had prevailed, and they could only hope that, having gone so far, the Church would grow and prosper in their midst. If the spirit shown in the initiation of this good work continued, and he felt confident it would, then its success was assured. The allotment of land which had been chosen and purchased for the purpose was most excellently situated, and the whole of the circumstances connected with the
movement were most gratifying. That in the short space of eighteen months they should be in a
position to erect free of debt a substantial building sufficient for all requirements, and have a
surplus, was indeed matter for congratulation. £550 had been gathered, and the building — the
foundation stone of which they were now about to lay — was to cost £435, so he thought it
might be said there would be an ample sum to cover those other items of furnishing etc., which
would be necessary to complete the church. He regretted very much that the Bishop of
Carpentaria could not lie present on this occasion to carry out duty he had been asked to
perform, as he was sure it would have given his lordship very great pleasure to have joined in
this function; and the absence of their respected vicar was also to be deplored — but he was
engaged in a mission connected with a more interesting and perhaps a more important
ceremony. So far as he was personally concerned he had under taken the duty with utmost
pleasure, although he felt there were some present who had a better title to the task. (Cheers.)

The stone was then laid, and declared to be "well and truly laid," with the accompanying wish
that the church might prosper for all time.

The hymn customary on such occasions was then sung by members of the church choir.

Mr. W. C. Langdon proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Justice Dashwood, which was carried with
acclamation, and to which Mr. Dashwood briefly responded.

Immediately following the ceremony some donations were laid upon the stone, but the total was
not over large.

The bottle buried in the concrete beneath the foundation stone contained a copy of the N. T.
Times and Government Gazette, of date July 11, 1902; a copy of the Rev H. P. Gocher's first
annual report; and a card containing the words "To the glory of God. Laid by Mr. Justice
Dashwood, July 12th, A.D., 1902," and the following signatures — Gilbert White, Bishop of

Northern Territory Times and Gazette (Darwin, NT: 1873 - 1927), Friday 31 October 1902, page 2

The New Church of England

Services were held in the newly completed Church of England building for the first time on
Sunday last, both morning and evening, one or two of the more enthusiastic members having
worked double tides to complete arrangements of seats, etc., so that this could be done. The
heaps of broken stone in front of the building is still an eyesore, but it is probable arrangements
will be made for the early removal of this and other debris, and the erection of a fence along the
front.

We understand from Rev. H. P. Gocher that the date for the holding of the Confirmation Service
will in all probability be announced by the Bishop on Sunday next. The new building will also be
formally consecrated on Sunday next, and we have been asked to publish the following details
of this ceremony for general information. At 3 p.m. the Bishop will examine the scholars, who
will sing special M.S tunes. At 8 p.m. there will be evensong, with the anthem "The radiant
morn hath passed away."

The congregation at all these services are asked to stand in their seats until the clergy have
passed out of the Church.
The following are the details of the Consecration Service supplied by the Rector—

Psalm cxii. Clergy, Wardens, Officials, and Bishop, with Chaplain, proceeding to principal entrance during the singing

Bishop — 'Lift up your heads'

Answer — 'Who is the King of Glory,' etc

Petition for consecration presented and read

Clergy and Bishop proceed to the chancel, Psalm xxiv

The Bishop then receives Instruments of Donation and Endowments

Hymn — Come, Holy Ghost, our souls Inspire

Let us pray—

Lord have mercy upon us

Christ have mercy upon us

Lord have mercy upon us

The Lord's Prayer Versicles—with the Responses—

1 Who hath made heaven and earth

2 Henceforth world without end

3 And let our cry come unto Thee All standing sing—'All people that on Earth'

During the singing the Bishop and clergy proceed to west end of the Church, and when hymn is ended, all standing, prayers are offered at the Font, Chancel Steps, Prayer Desk, Lectern, Pulpit, Choir Seats and Holy Table.

Bishop and people being seated the Registrar reads the Sentence of Consecration, which the Bishop signs and delivers to the Registrar, together with the Petition and Deed of Conveyance

Then follows the Choral Celebration (Tours) Anthem—'O how Amiable'

Sermon Hymn, with collection, and remainder of Communion Services

Stainer's 'Amen'

Nunc Dimittis.
Additional Photographs

Undated.
*Image: Northern Territory Archives Service NTRS 2958-24*

1908 – Christ Church.
*Image: State Library of South Australia*
Approximately 1911 – interior of Christ Church
Image: Darwin Collection, State Library of South Australia.

1912.
Image: NT Archives Service.
1942. Oil Fuel Installation bombed.
Image: Northern Territory Library.

October 1974 – possibly the last wedding at the church before Cyclone Tracy.
Image: Carmel Tuohy Collection.