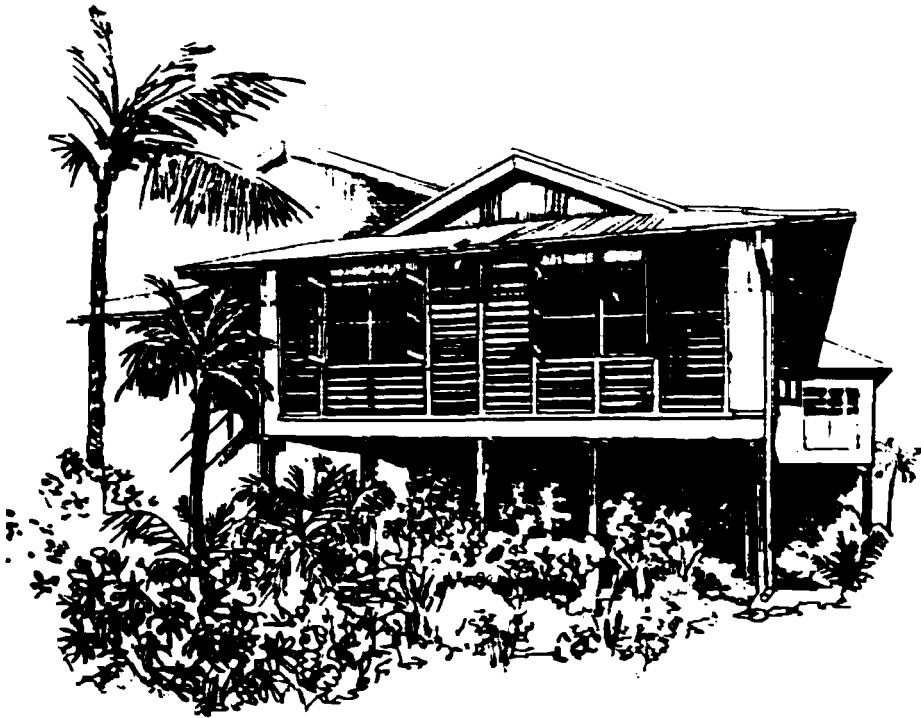


LOOKING AT DARWIN'S PAST

Material Evidence of European
Settlement in Tropical Australia

by David Carment



North Australia Research Unit
The Australian National University
Darwin

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Introduction

This is a book about white European settlement in tropical Australia. Darwin was one of the earlier European settlements in Australia's north and since its foundation in 1869 has been the headquarters of the administration of the Northern Territory. Despite its remoteness from other major population centres in Australia, harsh climate, natural disasters and a war, its cultural landscape includes structures and places that relate to significant aspects of the record of European settlement in the Australian tropics. Darwin's current built environment reveals various historical themes. Many of its structures and places can be viewed as historical documentation – either as statements about events and processes or as confirmation of evidence from other sources. In recent years very different ideas, and some conflict, have emerged about the preservation and interpretation of the city's historically significant elements.

I have used a multidisciplinary framework to structure this book. This is similar to the approach I used in research on the historical landscape of European settlement in Central Australia.¹ Historians, geographers and archaeologists all provided theoretical notions that I found most useful and are of considerable relevance to a contemporary study of Darwin.

Historians, both in Australia and in other parts of the world, have long believed that research and writing based on documents alone are inadequate. Several historians, such as Graeme Davison,² Chris McConville³ and Gregory Young,⁴ have demonstrated the ways in which historic landscapes and places have provided evidence for interpretive

¹ Carment 1991b

² Davison 1988, 55–76. Also see Davison (ed) 1990.

³ McConville 1984

⁴ Young 1984

models. Geographers, as William Norton has concisely outlined, have analysed the ways in which contemporary landscapes reveal the characters of past landscapes and the ways in which present cultural landscapes can be viewed as a consequence of the human past and the physical environment.⁵ David Lowenthal and the historical geographer DN Jeans have both argued that the techniques of geography, when combined with those of other disciplines, reveal perceptions of the past based partly on a cumulative body of relics and historical recognitions.⁶ Archaeology contributes much to an understanding of a remote urban settlement such as Darwin. Techniques in historical archaeology assist the reconstruction of working conditions and ways of life for which few, if any, written sources of information survive. Historical archaeologists Judy Birmingham and Graham Connah have demonstrated how such techniques reveal new and direct pictures of public and private lives, especially in sparsely populated and remote areas.⁷

No comprehensive and scholarly history of Darwin has yet been undertaken. Douglas Lockwood's *The Front Door*⁸ has been the only attempt so far to assess the city's past in detail but it is essentially a general account and does not address some significant social and cultural changes. It is based on written materials and, to a lesser extent, oral testimonies. The built environment is not used at all as a historical source. Even more academic general historic surveys of the Northern Territory, such as Alan Powell's excellent *Far Country*,⁹ use similar sources.

It has been mainly left to conservation organisations, notably the National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory) and the Australian Heritage Commission, to provide a wider historical perspective that comes from a study of material evidence. Both organisations have developed comprehensive databases on historically significant structures and places in Darwin, many of which have been placed on the Trust's register and

⁵ Norton 1984

⁶ Lowenthal 1985; Jeans (ed) 1984

⁷ Birmingham 1990; Connah 1988

⁸ Lockwood 1968

⁹ Powell 1982

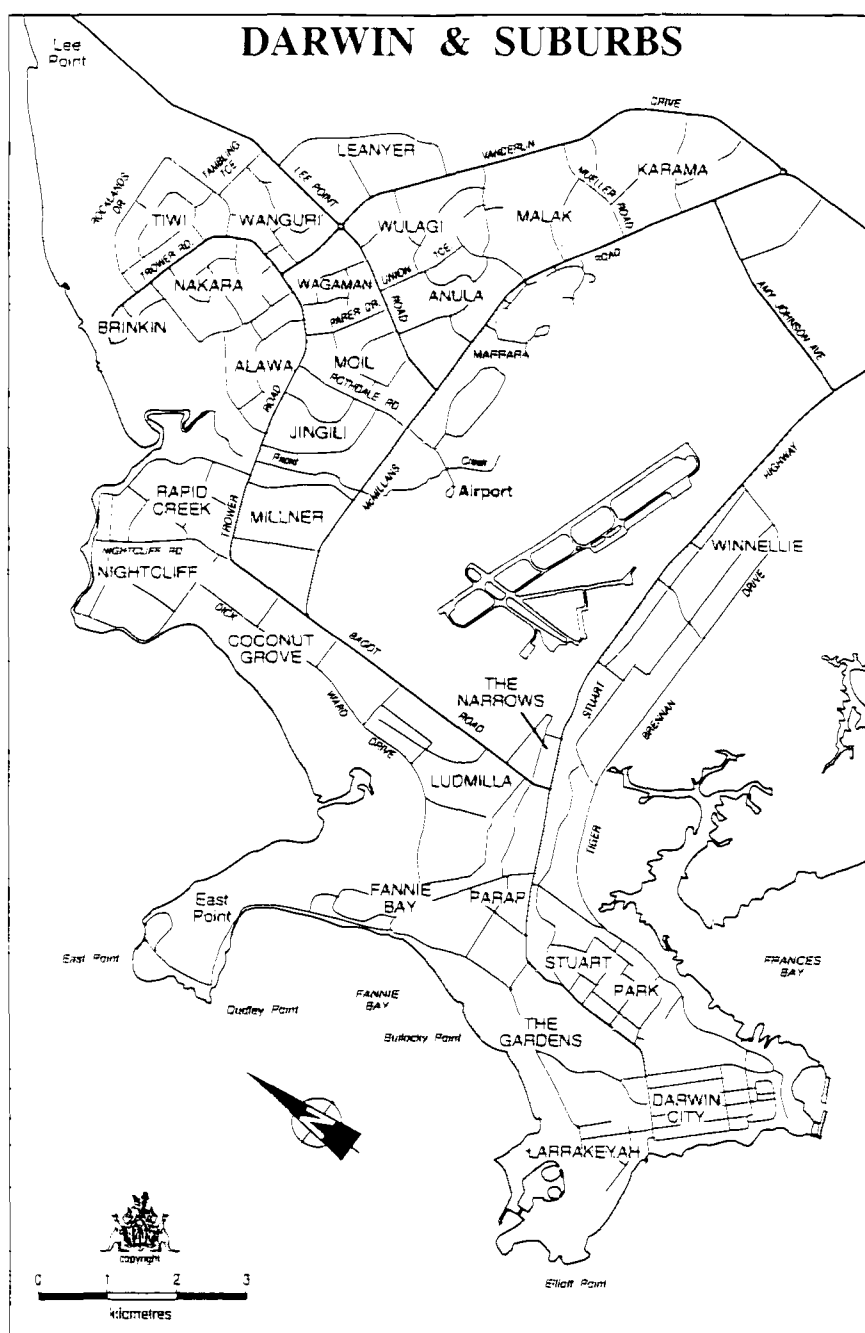


FIGURE 1 Darwin location map (courtesy of Northern Territory Department of Lands, Planning and Environment)

the Australian government's Register of the National Estate. In addition, the two organisations have been responsible for a wide range of consultants' reports. The most important is a National Trust survey by Adrian Welke and Helen Wilson that identifies and comprehensively documents almost 200 sites and buildings in the Darwin central business district of architectural merit or historic value.¹⁰ Also worthy of mention is Kathy De La Rue's fine report on Darwin's historical geography.¹¹

Given the climate and the impact of war, it is not surprising that the written records of Darwin's past are sometimes fragmentary. There are gaps in archival holdings due to such factors as heat, termites, bombs, storms, neglect, administrative inconsistency and deliberate destruction. Significant collections of private papers have been damaged or destroyed. Many Darwin people neither made nor kept written records. Often the transitory nature of much of the population militated against the development of private records and until quite recently oral history research in Darwin concentrated on the memories of its better known inhabitants. It is only possible to understand several vital themes in Darwin's European history when the evidence of historic structures is examined and explained.

This book is in many ways based on my residence in Darwin since 1981 and my commitment to the conservation of the city's built heritage. I have visited and photographed all the places discussed, usually many times. The bibliography mainly directs interested readers to sources that are quite easily available. Two of these deserve special mention. First, the dozens of bulging National Trust site files held at Burnett House, Darwin, contain a wealth of information, particularly from primary sources. A second key source is the Welke and Wilson survey mentioned above. It is based on impressively thorough research, often of frequently elusive archival materials.

This book attempts quite selectively to set elements of the story of Darwin in the wider context of white Australian culture. It is influenced throughout by perspectives derived from recent writings on post-

¹⁰ Welke & Wilson 1993

¹¹ De La Rue 1988

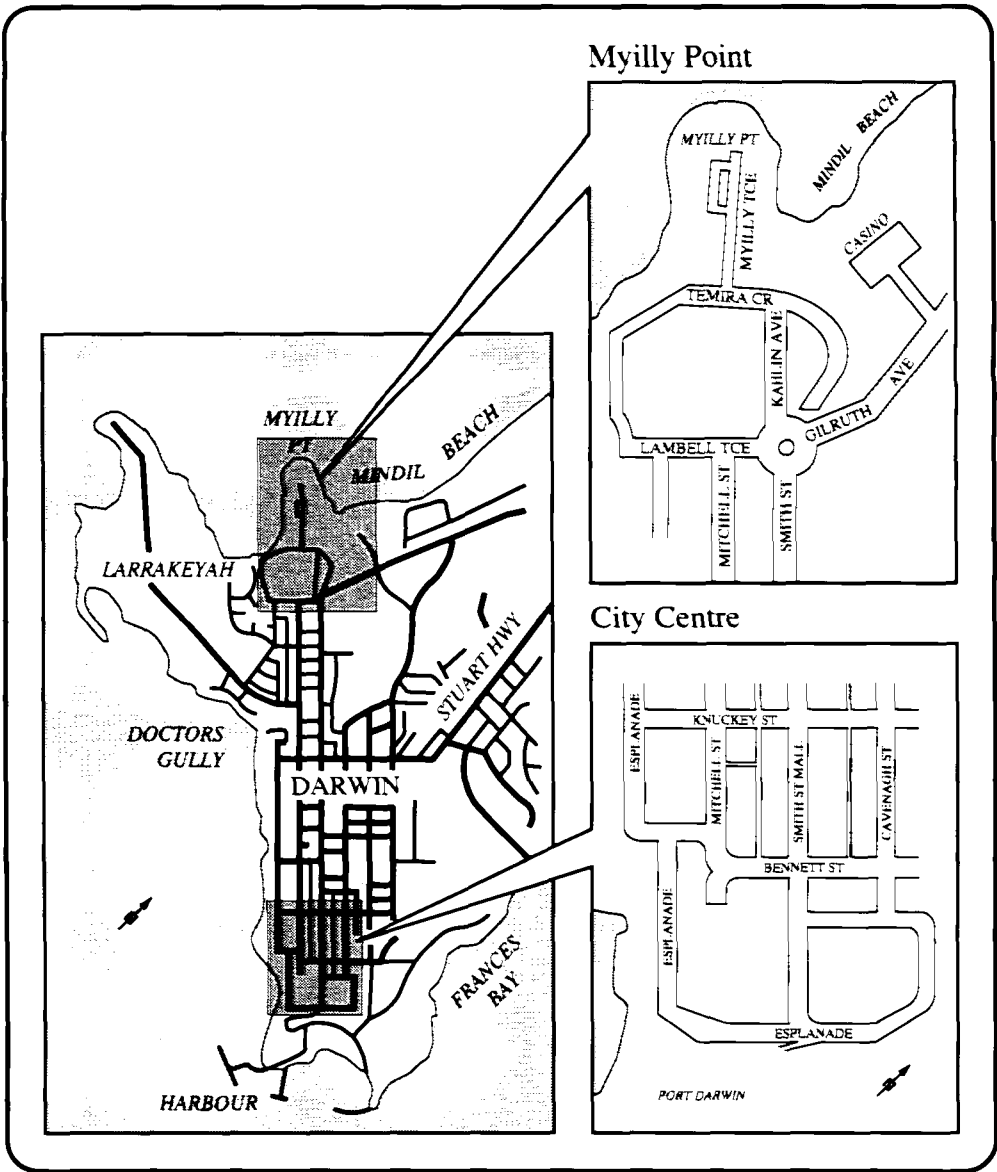


FIGURE 2 Darwin's central business district and adjacent suburbs (map produced before construction of Cullen Bay)

colonialism in Australia. Darwin's European inhabitants have, according to some of these perspectives, lived in a 'new country'. Yet, as Paul Carter recently argued,

Living in a new country is not an eccentricity: it is the contemporary condition. We live as others allow us to live, creating meeting places as we go along. Such places may be monumental, they may be nothing more than encounters, ... yet they can form the basis of a social fabric, one that does not suppress the contingency of its community but makes its migratory haphazardness the material out of which it weaves its identity.¹²

The role of Aborigines, Asians and 'mixed-race' people is obviously significant in this process and is considered quite frequently in the pages that follow. Mine is not, however, a general history of Darwin nor a completely comprehensive account of the city's historic places. If it were either, the discussion of non-Europeans would be far more extensive.

¹² Carter 1992, 8

1

A northern capital

Climate, Alan Powell contended, 'is the main unifying feature of the Top End of the Northern Territory' and Darwin 'owes much of its regional dominance to the lack of competition resulting from a natural environment that presents a severe challenge to European-based civilisation'.¹ The region has the most sharply differentiated of Australia's tropical wet-dry climates. During the 'wet' (November to April) there is high heat and humidity and an average rainfall of some 1500 mm. The 'dry' (May to October) has virtually no rainfall and is much less humid. For much of the year, however, temperatures regularly reach 30 degrees Celsius and more.²

The first Europeans to see the site of Darwin found a large harbour surrounded by flat land covered with eucalypt woodlands, a few patches of rainforest and abundant anthills. The Larrakia people were hunters and gatherers. They lived on and owned the site for thousands of years. Unlike the Europeans, they found the area rich – abundant in animal, bird and marine life. Their movements were based on the seasonal availability of food and water.³ By their very existence, Peter Donovan wrote, the

¹ Powell 1987, 281

² Powell 1987, 281

³ Mulvaney 1969, 57

Aborigines showed that people 'could survive in the harsh northern region – but only by being "ecologically adjusted" to the environment'.⁴ They were not submissive regarding the environment but had adapted to it.

Claims that Europeans encountered parts of the north Australian coast as early as the sixteenth century are the subject of much debate. Not until the seventeenth century did Dutch explorers make much of the coast known to other Europeans. Only in the early nineteenth century did the British chart sections of the coast in a methodical manner. Between 1824 and 1866 four attempts at white settlement on the northern coast proved conspicuous failures. There were many complex reasons including distance from the southern Australian colonies and the imperial capital in London, the mistaken assumption that the settlements would become Asian-Australian trading posts, and sheer incompetence.⁵

In 1839 Captain JC Wickham sailed from one of the settlements, Victoria on Port Essington, on a voyage to refine the work of previous navigators. In early September 1839 HMS *Beagle* neared what later became Darwin's harbour. John Lort Stokes, an officer, took a whaler into the harbour and on 9 September was the first European to land there. He named the harbour Port Darwin after the young naturalist, Charles Darwin, who had sailed on the *Beagle's* voyage around the world between 1831 and 1836.⁶ HMS *Beagle* entered Port Darwin on 14 September and exploring parties were sent out to find out more about what Stokes declared as a splendid stretch of water. They were most impressed with what they found, as Marsden Hordern later wrote in his outstanding study of Stokes.

From the *Beagle's* deck they watched the sun rise above a hill ... At noon with the temperature hovering around 80 degrees, they welcomed a refreshing breeze which ruffled the water and set the branches waving on the trees. And at nightfall they enjoyed a feast of colour: the sun, dipping over the harbour's western point, brushing a few wispy clouds near the horizon with the delicate pink of a rainbow trout before dropping quickly like molten iron into the Timor Sea. Then the last of the

⁴ Donovan 1981, 8

⁵ Cameron 1989

⁶ Hordern 1989, 168



PLATE 1 *The shores of Port Darwin, late nineteenth century, possibly Lameroo Beach
(from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 2 *Darwin rainforest, late nineteenth century, possibly near the port precinct
(from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

sea breeze and the splash of wavelets on the shore heralded a night full of stars, with the Cross lying low in the southern sky.⁷

However, more than two decades passed before Europeans established a permanent settlement at Port Darwin. On 6 July 1863 the Northern Territory was annexed by South Australia. The first South Australian attempt at colonisation was at Escape Cliffs, east of Port Darwin at the mouth of the Adelaide River in 1864. It was a poor site, nearly surrounded by mangroves and was abandoned after a couple of years.⁸ In November 1868 George Goyder, Surveyor General of South Australia, was given the task of finding and surveying a better settlement site. With a large and well-equipped party, he headed straight for Port Darwin, about which he had read in the writings of Stokes. From February to September 1869, Goyder and his team camped under the shadow of Fort Hill on the harbour's east side while they laid out a new town, Palmerston, on the low plateau to the north. The grid pattern of Adelaide was used. Many street names, such as Smith and Knuckey, commemorate the surveyors involved. The luxuriance of the vegetation impressed them. It was only later that the inhabitants of the new town discovered the poor quality of its soil.⁹ Goyder's choice of a site had significant long-term implications. Palmerston was right at the end of a quite narrow peninsula: there was easy access to the harbour but little scope for urban growth. This meant that later suburban expansion would be to the north on an east-west axis and oriented away from the sea. The present city centre of Darwin, where Goyder's party laid out the original streets, is above cliffs with a view of the water yet many suburbs hide inland.

In mid-December 1869 Dr JS Millner sailed from Adelaide to take up his appointment as Acting Government Resident in Palmerston. He arrived with 44 staff and 'settled down in Palmerston – and waited for something to happen'.¹⁰ They did not have to wait long. In October 1870 the South Australian government resolved to build an overland telegraph line from Port Augusta to Palmerston. At Port Darwin it would link with an

⁷ Hordern 1989, 171

⁸ Reece 1989

⁹ Lockwood 1968, 30–36

¹⁰ Powell 1982, 84

undersea cable that would allow Australians, for the first time, to communicate quickly with the rest of the world. The first pole was planted in a ceremony in Palmerston on 15 September 1870. Almost two years later, on 22 August 1872, the last section some several hundred kilometres to the south was joined. As well as bringing Australia into almost instant contact with other countries, the new line secured the future of the little town at its northern end. More than any other factor, it meant that Palmerston would not share the fate of earlier European settlements in the Northern Territory.¹¹

Equally important in the short term was the discovery of gold 200 kilometres to the south by men working on the construction of the telegraph line. Though the ensuing gold rush to the Pine Creek district was on a relatively small scale, it brought both people and a measure of prosperity to Palmerston in the 1870s and 1880s. It also resulted in the construction of a railway from Palmerston to Pine Creek and the immigration of the first Chinese to the area. The railway was completed in 1889 and made life easier for the inhabitants of the goldfields, but it never became part of a transcontinental line as had been hoped. Chinese were brought to the Territory from 1874 onwards to work as labourers on the goldfields and on the construction of the railway. Ultimately many moved into Palmerston, where they outnumbered the Europeans in the late 1880s by seven to one. Their businesses and market gardens provided essential supplies and services.¹²

For much of the period of South Australian control, which extended until 1911, the Territory's economy was beset with problems. Gold mining continued, yet not at the level once hoped. The pastoral industry had even more of a struggle while attempts at farming in the region around Palmerston were usually failures. There was little understanding of the climate and soil, and early assessments of the Top End's potential for land-based primary industries were often hopelessly over-optimistic. Sea-based industries showed a little more promise. Fishing supplied Palmerston with a tiny export surplus and for a time pearling appeared to have good prospects. The pearl beds, though, were scattered and the

¹¹ Taylor 1980

¹² Harvey 1987, chs 1–3; Jones 1987, chs 1–5; Jones 1990, chs 1–3

water was muddy. Pearling brought Thursday Islanders, Malays, Indonesians and Japanese into Palmerston.¹³ There were also racial divisions. The Chinese faced growing prejudice. The *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* condemned Palmerston's 'Chinatown' as a breeding ground for crime and disease. Anti-Chinese meetings were held.¹⁴ Not all Europeans were antagonistic to the Chinese. Some, like the senior official John Knight, welcomed their presence.¹⁵ Popular European opinion, though, supported the South Australian government's imposition of a poll tax on entry into the Territory.¹⁶ After 1888 Chinese numbers declined and their occupational status changed. The 'coolies' left but many businessmen stayed and remained a conspicuous element in Palmerston's population.¹⁷ There were nearly 300 Japanese in the Palmerston area in 1898, many employed in the pearling industry.¹⁸ After a visit to the Northern Territory in 1898, the journalist and author AB 'Banjo' Paterson wrote:

Palmerston is unique among Australian towns, inasmuch as it is filled with the boilings over of the great cauldron of Oriental humanity. Here comes the vagrant and shifting population of all the Eastern races. Here are gathered together Canton coolies, Japanese pearl divers, Malays, Manilamen, Portuguese from adjacent Timor, Cingalese, Zanzibar niggers looking for billets as stokers, frail (but not fair) damsels from Kobe: all sorts and conditions of men.¹⁹

Despite its small European population, social stratification always existed in Darwin. The Residency, home of successive Government Residents, was perched above the port area and became the centre for social life of senior public servants and their families, better-off professional people, and the operators of the British Australia Telegraph Company (the 'BAT') who supervised the cable link. There were balls, plays, lectures, picnics

¹³ Powell 1982, 103–105

¹⁴ Jones 1990, 49–95; Powell 1982, 115

¹⁵ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 26

¹⁶ Carment 1988, 7–9

¹⁷ Cross 1956

¹⁸ Powell 1982, 117–118

¹⁹ Paterson 1898, 213

and a variety of other social activities. Hunting was a popular activity among the men. Labourers, tradespeople, small shopkeepers and non-Europeans were largely excluded from such activities.²⁰

The 'cycloon' of 6 January 1897, Paterson stated, was the 'one great landmark in Palmerston's history'.²¹ It was the first of three very severe cyclones to hit the town, destroying many buildings and causing enormous damage to property. Eighteen pearling luggers were sunk or severely damaged. Chinatown was almost completely wrecked and had to be rebuilt. Twenty-eight residents were killed.²²

By the end of the nineteenth century Palmerston's original inhabitants, the Larrakia, had been forced from most of their land. A visiting journalist, William Sowden, recounted how in 1882 John Knight distributed 'largesse to the blacks' in the shape of 'flour doled out in a grocer's scoop'. 'T'was pitiful', he went on 'to see these people as they came for flour – came with old tins, and bits of dirty papers, and rags and leaves.'²³ Various other white people took a paternal interest in the Larrakia but with little understanding of their needs and values. In October 1882, for instance, Jesuit priests established a mission for Aborigines at Rapid Creek near Palmerston. It encountered numerous difficulties and closed down in 1891. The Jesuits made no conversions, claiming that the Larrakia had been associated with Europeans too long to be attracted by the Christian gospel.²⁴

Following protracted negotiations, the Northern Territory passed from South Australia to the Commonwealth of Australia in 1911. At the same time Palmerston was renamed Darwin, partly to acknowledge the fact that most of the town's residents had already used the name 'Port Darwin' for many years. A census at the end of the South Australian period gave a population for the town of 739 adult males, 166 adult females, 125 Japanese and 107 'others' (mainly Chinese). The Aboriginal

²⁰ Headon (ed) 1991, 209–217; Lockwood 1968, 77–133

²¹ Paterson 1898, 214

²² Powell 1982, 118

²³ Sowden 1882, 28

²⁴ O'Kelly 1967

population was not counted. It was also noted 145 of the town lots had never been selected.²⁵

In 1911 Darwin was not a visually impressive place but it had grown considerably since its foundation. The official buildings included Government House, formerly the Residency, and the nearby customs house, court house and police station. Other official buildings included a post office, a town hall, a railway station and workshop, a school and residences for government employees. All were located close to the port in what is now the central business district. A hospital overlooked Doctors Gully. A few kilometres away were the botanic gardens and the gaol at Fannie Bay. There were also three hotels, several boarding houses, a convent school, Chinese and European stores, a newspaper office, two banks, market gardens and houses. Recreation facilities included a racecourse, tennis courts and an oval and grandstand. The houses for Europeans mainly had wooden frames, wooden or iron walls, iron roofs and broad bamboo latticed verandahs. Some were raised on piles. In spite of very poor soil and problems with water, many European residents planted their gardens with palms and other exotic plants so that Darwin would more closely resemble their rather stereotyped image of a tropical outpost. In Chinatown the houses were also usually timber and iron but were very poorly lit and ventilated with few, if any, provisions for proper sanitation.²⁶ As Kathy De La Rue commented, 'The list sounds most impressive for a town of about 1,000 residents' yet the reality 'was far less promising.'

Most of the government-owned buildings were constructed, at least partly, with the local stone as were some of the private structures. Unfortunately many of the buildings provided insufficient accommodation, and additions had been made of wood and corrugated iron. Almost all the government buildings were in a state of disrepair ... and many of the dwellings were in a similar condition.²⁷

²⁵ Welke & Wilson 1993, xii

²⁶ De La Rue 1988, 22–24

²⁷ De La Rue 1988, 23



PLATE 3 *Darwin's Esplanade, late nineteenth century (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 4 *Central Darwin, early twentieth century. Government House is in the right background (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 5 A gathering at Government House, early twentieth century (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)



PLATE 6 Darwin's wharf at about the time of the First World War (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)

The first Commonwealth Administrator of the Northern Territory was the dynamic but difficult Dr John Gilruth. He worked hard to find ways to develop the economy and placed great hope in the pastoral industry. The key here, he believed, was a freezing works for beef in Darwin. In June 1914 the Commonwealth government formally agreed to the Vestey group of companies building and operating the Darwin meatworks. The agreement provided 'Vesteys', a vast family-owned British concern, with an important stake in the Territory. By 1916 they controlled some of the Territory's biggest pastoral leases. The meatworks, however, proved a dismal failure. Comprising a large complex at Bullocky Point, now the site of Darwin High School, it did not open until 1917. Strikes and the failure to complete the extension of the railway to the Katherine River reduced production. The works closed in 1920 and, apart from a short period in 1925, never reopened.²⁸

Darwin was devastated. Vesteys had been the town's major employer and its operations had played a large part in doubling the population of the Territory between 1911 and 1919 ... two thirds of Darwin men were left without employment ... The men of the Australian Workers Union saw the closure as an act of treachery to their country and their class; conservatives tended to blame union aggressiveness and government interference.²⁹

Whatever the causes might have been, Gilruth was partly blamed. His unpopularity increased at a time when he was under fire over a variety of other issues. He was rather unfairly criticised because Territorians after 1911 were disenfranchised. He alienated both the Palmerston District Council, and its successor the Darwin Town Council, and found himself in conflict with the increasingly militant local trade union movement under the leadership of the aggressive and charismatic Harold Nelson. Further discontent came in 1915 when the Commonwealth government, partly in an attempt to reduce public drunkenness, nationalised all Darwin's hotels, causing Gilruth to be blamed for subsequent overcrowding and poor food and accommodation. By 1918 the Administrator and the trade unionists were in open conflict. On 17 December 1918 during 'the Darwin Rebellion' hundreds of men

²⁸ Alcorta 1984, 16–25, 31–32, 46, 69–70, 79, 81–83, 87–90, 101, 111

²⁹ Powell 1982, 153

marched on Government House. Gilruth was physically attacked. The Commonwealth government recalled him in February 1919 and later removed other unpopular senior officials. For a while the unionists were triumphant. Whereas a special commission of inquiry condemned the Gilruth administration, Nelson was subjected to no criticism at all. In 1922, when the Territory gained a seat without voting rights in the Commonwealth House of Representatives, Harold Nelson was elected as the first member.³⁰

Without Vestey's meatworks, Darwin for much of the decade after the end of the First World War was in the doldrums. Between 1927 and 1931 the town's importance was further reduced when Central Australia was created a separate territory with Alice Springs as its capital. There was, though, one development with significant implications. On 10 December 1919 the first aviators to fly from Britain to Australia, Ross and Keith Smith and their crew, landed on a new runway at Fannie Bay. Two days later the first aircraft to fly from Melbourne to Darwin also arrived there. These events opened 'new vistas of rapid communications for the Territorians'. Before long Darwin would be the first landing place in Australia for international flights. 'The "back door of Australia", as Darwin was often disparagingly called, would be transformed into the "front door"'.³¹

The Great Depression which began in 1929 brought particularly severe problems to the small and isolated town of Darwin. Unemployed people drifted in from other parts of Australia seeking work that did not exist. Protesters occupied the Administrator's office in April 1930 and later that year there were demonstrations in which Communists played some part. The Commonwealth authorities subsequently attempted to get rid of the more radical individuals by restricting unemployment relief to those who had been in the Territory before March 1931 and paying for over a hundred others to leave. Class feelings were inflamed and Eric Sager has suggested that working class solidarity became stronger than racial differences.³²

³⁰ Alcorta 1984; Carment 1986, 289–290

³¹ De La Rue 1988, 30

³² Sager 1993, ch 10

As economic conditions slowly improved in the early 1930s the international political situation worsened following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The Commonwealth government paid increasing attention to northern defence and permanent armed forces facilities were established in Darwin. Much new building resulted and the extensive fortifications at East Point were commenced. The increased defence presence provided both employment and much needed funds for civilian infrastructure. Darwin's population rose from 1500 in June 1932 to 3653 in June 1939, excluding those in the armed services. More civilian houses were built and the suburbs of Fannie Bay and Parap developed. Electricity was connected, water supplies were improved and air services increased in frequency. Though a severe cyclone in March 1937 caused considerable damage, this was fairly quickly repaired. Unlike the earlier big cyclone in 1897, only one life was lost.³³ Darwin was changing quickly. New commercial buildings appeared, especially in Smith Street, while substantial houses were erected for better-off residents, senior public servants and armed services officers. RA McInnis, the Brisbane City Planner, was contracted to prepare a town planning scheme for Darwin, which he produced in 1940.³⁴ In particular, the population was becoming more European and the proportion of white women was rising. Yet, it is apparent from Eric Sager's evocative description of the town's central business area in the late 1930s that obvious Asian influences remained.

From the Esplanade you look north, along Cavenagh Street ... Some buildings are quite substantial stone edifices with verandahs sloping to the edge of the street. Others are little shack-like shops of galvanised iron and wood. On your left is Fang Choong Loong & Co. The dirt street is hot, but inside Fang Choong Loong it is even hotter, for they are blowing hot coals into huge irons and running the irons over sheets of cloth. Next door is Yam Yan's, and then a number of smaller shops, including a few groceries, a tailor, Ming's cafe...³⁵

With the coming of war in 1939 more attention was given to the defence of Australia's north. Many servicemen were stationed in Darwin. Japan

³³ Welke & Wilson 1993, xix–xv

³⁴ Gibson 1989, chs 1–4; Wilson 1986, chs 1–7

³⁵ Sager 1993, 13

entered the conflict at the end of 1941 and as its forces advanced rapidly southwards it became clear that Darwin might soon be on the front line. Much of the non-Aboriginal civilian population was hurriedly evacuated and Darwin's beaches were fortified. The naval and air defences, however, were weak. The enemy finally struck on the morning of 19 February 1942 when Japanese aircraft launched a devastating bombing attack on the town without warning. Ships anchored in the harbour were sunk or damaged. Bombs fell on the wharf and destroyed the post office. Many other buildings were hit. Though many defenders, both in the armed services and among the civilian population, showed great courage, others panicked and fled. At least 243 people were killed in the attack. Even greater damage to property occurred when undisciplined servicemen systematically looted many surviving buildings. Other air raids followed. From March 1942 Darwin was under strict military control. Very few civilians remained and the badly damaged town served as a base in the war against the Japanese. The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Aubrey Abbott, and his officials moved to premises in Alice Springs. They did not return until the war's end.³⁶

There were many effects of the war. All freehold land was resumed. Over half of Darwin's buildings were destroyed and the structures that survived were mostly in very poor condition. Residents who came back in 1946 and afterwards discovered that their treasured belongings were lost or stolen, and the authorities were forced to admit that looting and vandalism by troops had been widespread. Some residents protested that the compensation offered was inadequate. Yet there were benefits. The Top End of the Territory was given a network of well-built roads and the Stuart Highway was sealed between Darwin and Alice Springs. There were better wharf facilities, a new hospital and improved power and water supplies.³⁷ Perhaps most importantly, those residents who returned knew that in spite of the devastation and loss of possessions, Darwin was where they wanted to live. This was, as one long-term resident of Darwin, Maisie Austin, recalled, particularly true among people who had been born or had grown up there.

³⁶ The best account of Darwin's war experience is found in Powell 1988.

³⁷ De La Rue 1988, 5; Welke & Wilson 1993, xv



DARWIN -- Salient Points

Distance from Australian Capitals: By land, Adelaide 1,610; by sea, Brisbane 2,250, Sydney 2,650, Melbourne 3,350, Perth 2,050. It has an excellent harbour and enjoys a wonderful climate between April and November—its mean temperature is 81.3. Buffalo shooting and crocodile hunting attract many visitors. Population 1,600.

PLATE 7 'The Port of the North'. A 1939 card showing the almost completed Hotel Darwin (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)



PLATE 8 Darwin Post Office and residence after the Japanese bombing of 19 February 1942 (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)

So with true pioneering spirit, they began to rebuild their homes and their lives. Regardless of nationality – European, Chinese, Filipino, part-Aborigine, half-caste Malay, Greek or any other, the purpose was the same – rebuild Darwin; and although they shared hardships and poverty, they formed a true and long-lasting bond of friendship.³⁸

In the difficult postwar period a large measure of pioneering spirit was required. Australia's resources were concentrated on the commercial and housing needs of areas where there were large populations. The rebuilding of Darwin was slow and messy. A government reconstruction plan only allowed short-term leases until the final form of a new 'Canberra in the tropics', a completely replanned Darwin, was known. But after the Liberal-Country Party coalition under Robert Menzies came to federal office in 1949 the proposed plan was put aside and long-term leases were granted.³⁹ In the meantime, many Darwin residents were forced to live in inadequate temporary accommodation in camps of galvanised iron huts with push-out windows, no wall linings and no fly screens or fans. There were communal kitchens and washrooms. Maisie Austin remembered that,

The huts were divided by makeshift partitioning, which did not always extend to the roof but could be extended with permission, at your own expense. A piece of arc mesh separated our family from the small hut adjoining ours ... All other partitioning was of masonite, curtain or hessian material ... Families of up to 12 lived in some of these half huts.⁴⁰

In 1951 the new Commonwealth Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, found in a walk around Darwin that,

The Esplanade, apart from a small patch at the football ground, was a wilderness of high brown grass from which the rubbish of war had not yet been cleared. Doctors Gully was a junk yard. The old post office was a roofless ruin. The harbour had not been cleared of the wrecks left by the wartime raids ... In the main street none of the war-scarred buildings had been repaired ... The skyline of Darwin was dominated by the vandalised bulk of the meatworks...⁴¹

³⁸ Austin 1992, 8

³⁹ Gibson 1989, 75–94

⁴⁰ Austin 1992, 12

⁴¹ Hasluck 1992, 2–3

Under Hasluck's guidance the damage was finally repaired and the town developed, to a large extent, along old lines. There was, though, one exception. Chinatown, 'badly hit by Japanese bombs, was never rebuilt – and the younger members of the Chinese community, fast merging into the general Australian community, had no desire to return to the old ways'.⁴² With increased Commonwealth expenditure on the Territory's development and infrastructure and spurred on by the establishment of a Territory Legislative Council with elected representatives and appointed officials that first met in 1948, the next 25 years witnessed growth unprecedented in Darwin's history. The best known local journalist of that period, Douglas Lockwood, observed in 1969 that,

Today, Darwin is a desirable place to live. A week seldom passes without cultural activity of some kind, including an annual festival. The sprouting city has growing pains. It is bursting with development. Take a drive to Nightcliff and Rapid Creek and the other new suburbs. Millions of pounds are being spent on big building projects. The main city streets, built from a near-slum at the war's end, are graced by new banks, offices and shopping arcades.⁴³

Change became more rapid during the 1960s and early 1970s. Air-conditioning was almost universally introduced to commercial buildings. 'High-rise' buildings like the Travelodge Motel and the MLC offices were erected. Darwin's population in 1974 was 46,656, increasing at an annual rate of nine per cent.⁴⁴ Private contractors did well. Increased immigration by people of various nationalities, most notably Greeks, enriched the population. In 1966 a member of the Chinese community, Harry Chan, was elected Mayor.⁴⁵ In 1974 the first fully elected Northern Territory Legislative Assembly met in Darwin.

Cyclone Tracy, the worst natural disaster in Australia's history, hit Darwin on Christmas Eve 1974. Its impact was devastating. Forty-nine people were killed on land and another sixteen at sea. Only 400 houses

⁴² Powell 1982, 219

⁴³ Lockwood 1969, 91–192

⁴⁴ Welke & Wilson 1993, xvii

⁴⁵ De La Rue 1988, 40–41

throughout the city were left intact, although the new concrete and steel public buildings stood up quite well.

The elevated houses in the new northern suburbs were the worst affected.⁴⁶ These lightweight, single room width dwellings offered maximum cross-ventilation during the long hot weather and stood on metal or reinforced concrete piers, allowing cool air to circulate underneath. However, they were not built to withstand cyclones. Keith Cole, a cyclone survivor and later its historian, claimed that the cyclone stories of people who lived in the elevated houses were almost identical.

When the bedrooms began to sway and take in water through louvres and windows, and roofs began to lift, the occupants sheltered in bathrooms, toilets, and the kitchen-dining areas. When roofs blew off and windows blew in, some people remained in the comparative safety of the small, box-like, toilet bathroom area, built of timber. Others ran downstairs and sought shelter under the house.⁴⁷

Alan Powell, another Darwin resident in 1974, recalled that, 'No one who lived through that night is ever likely to forget it or the eerie sight of the wreckage left behind.'⁴⁸ A mass-evacuation followed the cyclone and by January 1975 only 10,600 people remained of whom most were essential service personnel.⁴⁹

The federal government decided within days that Darwin should be rapidly rebuilt. New 'Tracy trauma' houses, not well suited to tropical living and constructed like small fortresses, were established in suburbs such as Anula and Wulagi. Elsewhere damaged buildings were repaired and strengthened. Following the granting of self-government to the Territory in 1978, development continued apace. Further new suburbs appeared as did a satellite town, Palmerston, developed because of a lack of suitable land close to Darwin. There were extensive and sometimes controversial capital works, including a massive hospital at Tiwi, a new wharf, a patrol boat base, a casino and luxury hotels. In recent years

⁴⁶ Cole 1977

⁴⁷ Cole 1977, 27

⁴⁸ Powell 1982, 239. Powell was absent at the time of the cyclone but returned shortly afterwards.

⁴⁹ Welke & Wilson 1993, xviii



PLATE 9 Cyclone Tracy damage, Parer Drive (Northern Territory Library
Northern Australia Collection)

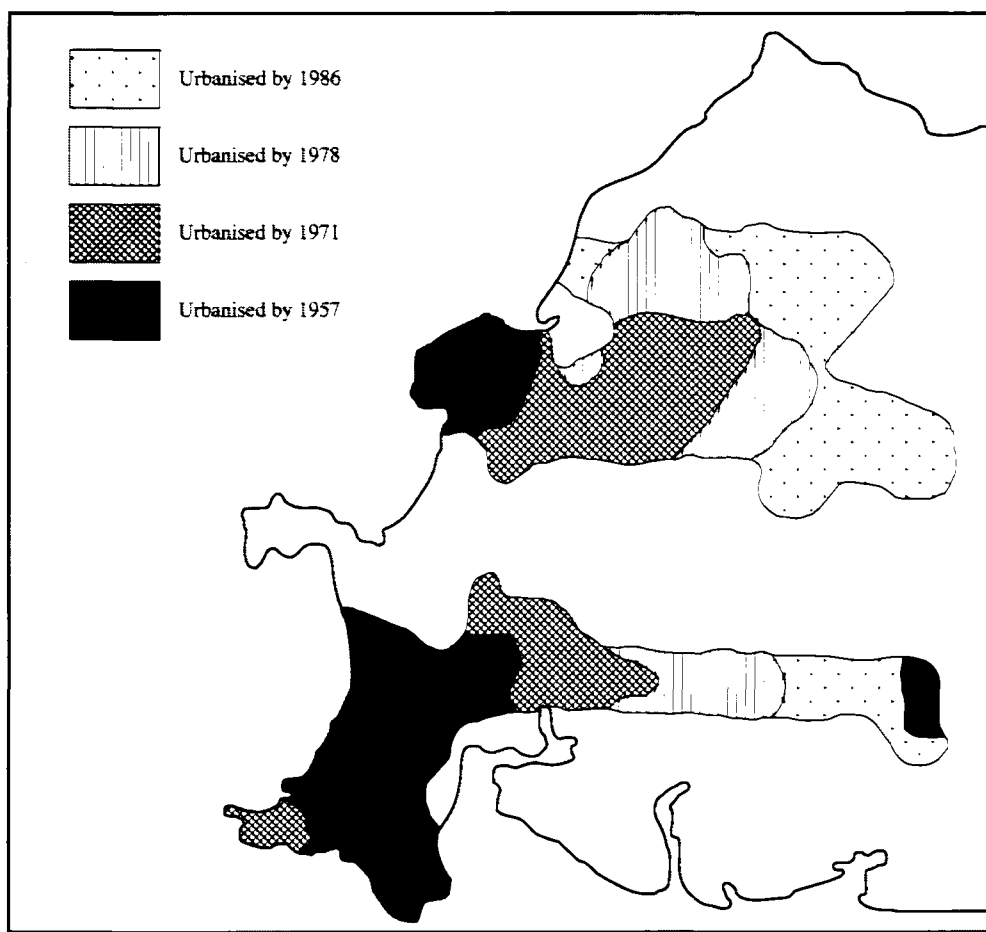


FIGURE 3 *Darwin's urban expansion 1957–1986*
(adapted from Heatley, 1986, 3)

a new performing arts centre, a Supreme Court building and, most contentious of all due to its cost and design, a new parliament house have been built. In addition, large new suburban shopping complexes have been constructed. The population became more settled and in 1979 Darwin was raised to capital city status.⁵⁰ In 1991 there were 78,401 people living in the Darwin Statistical Division. Of these, approximately a quarter were of Aboriginal descent.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Welke & Wilson 1993, xviii; Powell 1982, 240–243

⁵¹ ABS 1993, 19



PLATE 10 *Christ Church Anglican cathedral after Cyclone Tracy (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 11 *Darwin's central business district viewed from the north*

In many ways Darwin is now similar to other Australian urban areas; in some respects perplexingly so. Its suburbs resemble those of Sydney and Melbourne and some recent architecture largely ignores the tropical conditions. Gardens and lawns, frequently neglected between the 1940s and the 1960s due to the largely transient population, often require vast amounts of water so that the desired green and lush appearance can be maintained in the harsh heat. The shape of Darwin today owes more to imported planning principles than any local influences. Widely promoted by the Northern Territory government as an 'Asian Gateway', some antagonism remains towards Asians and other non-Europeans among members of Darwin's white population. Recent attempts to capitalise economically on the proximity of Asia have only had limited success.⁵² The cultural baggage that Europeans and their white Australian descendants brought to Darwin at various times is still very obvious.

For many Australians, though, Darwin remains a remote and rather strange outpost at the far extremity of their continent. Visiting poet Les A Murray in 1984 wrote of reality in Darwin being 'stacked on handsbreadth shelving' and a world there seen 'through a cranked or levered weatherboarding of explosive glass angled floor-to-ceiling. Horizons which metre the dazzling outdoors into green-edged couplets.'⁵³ For author Suzanne Falkiner in 1992 Darwin, 'capital of the last region of Australia that the British settlers made their own', was 'the most isolated of Australian cities, and yet also the most exotic and cosmopolitan'.⁵⁴ Despite its overall 'modern' appearance, Darwin is a city where the evidence of an often colourful past is both extensive and pervasive.

⁵² Carment 1995

⁵³ Murray 1984, 223

⁵⁴ Falkiner 1992, 204

2

Imposing authority

Darwin was established as a government outpost and since 1869 it has been a regional headquarters for various government agencies. All of the city's oldest surviving structures initially had administrative functions. This chapter will discuss some that were associated with political authority and the application of law and order.

For many years the most imposing government structure in Darwin was Government House – known as 'The Residency' before 1911. It has been the home of successive South Australian Government Residents and Commonwealth Administrators. A large stone single-storey building with distinctive gables, Government House commands a panoramic view from its location on a natural plateau above Darwin Harbour. 'Few buildings', wrote Barbara James, 'have been the focal point for such diverse, colourful and often controversial events and personalities.'¹

Government House was reconstructed and altered at various times. The first building, of which only a room survives, comprised substantial stone rooms which accommodated the house's principal function areas. The central stone hall, now the drawing room, was built in 1871 and is the oldest known non-Aboriginal structure in Darwin. 'If that room could

¹ James nd[1990], 3

“talk” it would have some fascinating tales to tell – of cyclones, enemy attacks, earthquakes, refugees, famous visitors, celebrations and lively demonstrations’ mused Barbara James.² There is a wide and commodious verandah, once enclosed with split bamboo and now fitted with asbestos cement louvres. Welke and Wilson commented that it ‘is one of a series of stone buildings suggestive of pretension and permanence with borrowed architectural form and detail consistent with contemporary southern capital building’.³

The site of Government House was selected for the home of the Government Resident in June 1870 when Bloomfield Douglas arrived with his family. The old stone drawing room was initially part of a wooden building that termite attacks rapidly made unsafe. The consequence was that a new stone building had to be erected. It was designed by architect John Knight and the surveyor Gilbert McMinn and completed in 1879. Most of their structure still exists.⁴ In May 1879 the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* reported that the ‘House of 7 gables known as the Residence, is now finished, and although it may not be considered a model of architectural skill, it must claim to be a comfortable house, and well suited to the climate’.⁵ Rooms were large and could be divided by wooden partitions without alterations to the doors and windows.

The ‘house of seven gables’ has been closely associated with the history of the Northern Territory. All Government Residents and Administrators have lived there. Some of the building’s inhabitants made decisions that thus had significant implications. There were times when Government House became a focus for protest. Probably the best known case was on 17 December 1918 when, as recounted earlier, hundreds of people marched on the house to demand the removal of Dr Gilruth as Territory Administrator. When Gilruth initially refused, tempers flared and some demonstrators stormed the building. The building has also been the

² James nd [1990], 3

³ Welke & Wilson 1993, 267

⁴ Carment Wilson & James 1993, 39; James nd [1990], 2–12; Welke & Wilson 1993, 267

⁵ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 17 May 1879

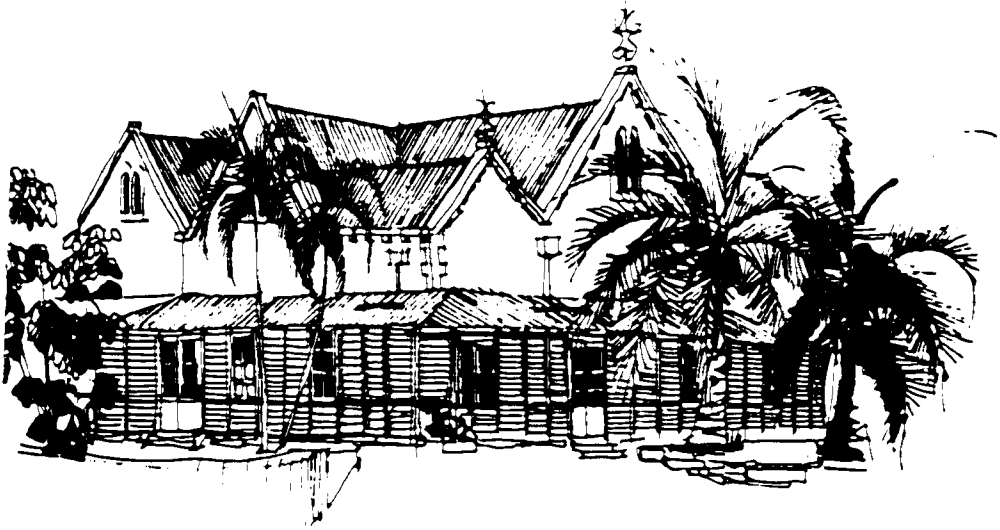


FIGURE 4 *Sketch of Government House (Adrian Welke)*



PLATE 12 *Government House, the Esplanade (Northern Territory Library
Northern Australia Collection)*

centre for both state and royal visits. Darwin's three major cyclones caused extensive damage and in February 1942 enemy bombing caused more damage. It was suggested after the Second World War that a new Government House be built elsewhere but this did not occur. Following Cyclone Tracy the existing house was both modernised and, in some places, restored.⁶



PLATE 13 *Former court house and police station, the Esplanade*

Outstanding among Darwin's oldest administrative structures is a complex on the Esplanade not far from Government House that includes the former police station, court house, court house annexe and cell block remains. Described by local architects Adrian Welke and Philip Harris as 'perfectly early South Australian', the single storey buildings have simple verandahs, hipped roofs with minimal overhang and walls of porcellanite stone.⁷ The buildings 'were in stark contrast to the general, lightweight, temporary texture (typified by corrugated galvanised iron) of most of the

⁶ James nd [1990]

⁷ Welke & Harris nd [1981], 8

rest of the town'. The wide verandahs 'onto which open large windows together with high internal ceilings were early design responses to moderate the tropical climate'.⁸

Construction of the court house and police station commenced in 1879 and proceeded in stages with both Knight and McMinn being in charge of the work at different times. In June 1884 Knight decided that a verandah would be added to the rear of the court house. In August of the following year he ordered several alterations to the rooms there and was responsible in November for having a 'punkah' installed in the circuit court room.⁹ WV Mason in an exhaustive review of the available evidence concluded in 1968 that the buildings 'were almost certainly from Knight's hand although no reference to the designer has so far been found'.¹⁰

The buildings, like those at Government House, were a most important part of the apparatus of government. Police business and legal cases were conducted in them. Some of the policemen and legal figures were unusual characters. Judge Tom Wells, who presided over some particularly contentious cases concerning Aborigines in the court house from his arrival in Darwin in September 1933 until February 1942, made his presence felt almost immediately. Taking his place on the bench on 27 September, he made a gesture that his biographer, Peter Elder, described as 'characteristic of his irreverence for formality and often idiosyncratic behaviour'. In defiance of social convention, he permitted the jurors to remove their coats and counsel to take off their wigs and gowns before following suit himself.¹¹ On 1 October 1942 the Royal Australian Navy took over the complex. The Navy retained control until Cyclone Tracy, using the buildings as its Darwin headquarters. Very seriously damaged by the cyclone, they remained derelict until 1981 when the Northern Territory Department of Transport and Works rebuilt them. The work under the supervision of a conservation architect, Alan Hammond, made every effort to ensure that the external fabric of the court house and police

⁸ Welke & Wilson 1993, 5

⁹ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 49

¹⁰ Mason 1968, 485

¹¹ Elder 1992, 225

station resembled its original state. Now used as offices for the Administrator of the Northern Territory and his staff, the buildings survive in the 1990s as elements of what was once a larger government precinct and have considerable architectural and townscape values.¹²

All that remain of Darwin's first Town Hall are stabilised remnants of its stone walls. Cyclone Tracy destroyed the rest of the building. The original structure was based on a simple rectangular plan and constructed of local porcellanite stone with a corrugated galvanised iron roof. For many years the headquarters of the only local government authority in the Northern Territory, the Town Hall was also a focus for varied community activities.¹³

The Town Hall was another project for John Knight. He designed the building *and* supervised its erection.¹⁴ On 17 August 1883 the Government Resident, EW Price, laid the foundation stone, stating that it was,

the first building of its kind erected in Palmerston, and I think it may be considered a sign of progress that the Council could afford such a handsome Town Hall. The large room will be eighty feet long by thirty five and will not be a barn, but a really handsome structure; and the fact that Mr Knight is the architect will be a sufficient warrant that the Palmerston Town Hall will be an ornament to the town (Cheers).¹⁵

The hall was finally opened in early March 1883, with a formal banquet to celebrate the occasion.¹⁶

It was used initially for the Palmerston District Council and ultimately for the Darwin Town Council, until the latter was abolished in 1937. During that period it was the location for numerous meetings in which council members and staff grappled with the problems before them. Probably the best known of the town's Mayors was Douglas Crombie (Jim) Watts, prominent in the 'Darwin Rebellion' of 1918, and later one of the 'martyrs' imprisoned for 28 days in Fannie Bay Gaol for refusing to pay taxes until the Territory gained

¹² National Trust, site file 6/304

¹³ Welke & Wilson 1993, 257–259

¹⁴ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 43–44

¹⁵ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 19 August 1882

¹⁶ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 10 March 1883



PLATE 14 *Darwin Town Hall, early twentieth century (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

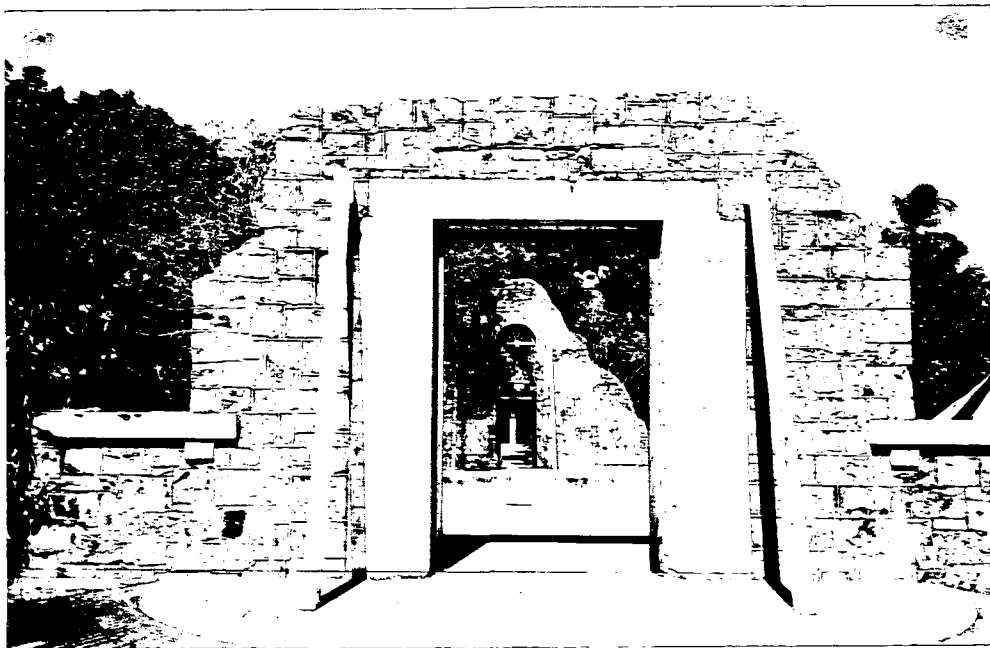


PLATE 15 *Former Town Hall, Smith Street*

representation in the federal parliament.¹⁷ For many years the hall was the scene of plays and concerts, which often attracted large and appreciative audiences. After 1937 the building had a variety of uses. It was a branch of the Commonwealth Bank, a taxation office, a workshop and storage area and a museum. Cyclone Tracy tore most of the structure apart but the remains were stabilised as a monument to the cyclone.¹⁸ In recent years they have often provided a venue for dry season dramatic performances, particularly of Shakespeare.

Graphic evidence of the impact of white political and administrative authority on Aboriginal people can be found a few kilometres from the central business district at the former Fannie Bay Gaol commenced in 1883 and now operating as a museum. The great majority of prisoners within the gaol were nearly always Aboriginal, most of whom were victims of the steady expansion of European authority and had little notion of the legal system that resulted in their imprisonment.

The various gaol buildings demonstrate, as JS Kerr and Bill Tyler have persuasively argued, the considerable adaptations of penal design needed to accommodate a largely Aboriginal prison population. The oldest, dating back to the 1880s, include masonry cell blocks and an infirmary. The mainly iron clad structures with large 'communal' cells specially designed to hold Aboriginal inmates are more recent. Also included are ablution areas, exercise yards, kitchen and dining areas and storage facilities. The gaol's relative intactness and the survival of details of its use in both its fabric and its fittings enable it to retain a powerful penal atmosphere and to show prisoners' routines and living conditions. Its structures, remains and adjacent areas are a most valuable historical resource and a place of considerable interest to many visitors.¹⁹ As Tyler stated, the gaol illustrates 'interesting adaptations (particularly in spatial and architectural terms) of the classical prison to the non-European culture of the imprisoned population'.²⁰

¹⁷ Wilson 1992, 224

¹⁸ Welke & Wilson 1993, 258–259

¹⁹ Kerr 1981; National Trust, site file 6/302; Ross & Carment 1989; Tyler 1993

²⁰ Tyler 1993, 32



PLATE 16 *Fannie Bay Gaol, about 1925. The infirmary is outside the walls on the left
(from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

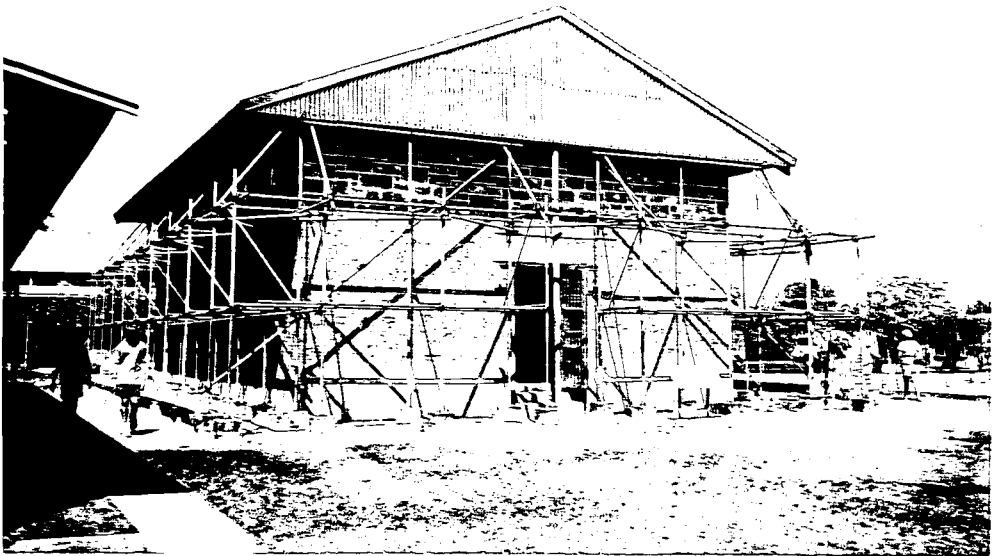


PLATE 17 *Former infirmary, Fannie Bay Gaol. The 'parasol' roof was erected after
Cyclone Tracy*

Building of the gaol commenced early in 1883 with the indefatigable John Knight designing at least a couple of the first structures, including the surviving infirmary.²¹ On 16 January 1884 it was gazetted and proclaimed as the Palmerston Gaol and Labour Prison, Fannie Bay.²² A contemporary observer noted that,

It seems a necessity with the government that all the surroundings of a gaol shall have a harsh and austere look so as, we suppose, to be in general keeping with the character of the buildings ... The stone used appears to be very good being in much larger blocks than that seen in buildings in Palmerston ... Perhaps the architect was a Politician.²³

The subsequent roll call of Fannie Bay prisoners, including the famous Aboriginal 'outlaws' Nemarluk and Tuckiar, made it one of the best known prisons in Australia. In 1920 leading Darwin citizens like Watts and Nelson were imprisoned there for refusing to pay taxes in their struggle for political representation. Female cells were completed in 1928. During the late 1930s prisoners were used for construction work at the new civil aerodrome and military barracks and following the bombing of Darwin in 1942 the prisoners were released and the gaol used for military purposes. In 1952 it was the scene of the last hanging in the Northern Territory. Cyclone Tracy partially destroyed the gaol, and in 1979 it was finally closed with the prisoners being transferred to the new gaol at Berrimah. It was subsequently developed as a museum.²⁴

A much more recent building associated with the implementation of law is the former Supreme Court in Mitchell Street. The three-storey structure of reinforced concrete and steel fits three court rooms and ancillary facilities. Completed in 1965, it served as the home for the Northern Territory Supreme Court until 1991. It was, like the earlier court house, the scene for many well-known trials. Welke and Wilson noted its 'horizontal street profile with a regular structural colonnade and

²¹ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 45–47

²² Northern Territory Museums & Art Galleries Board 1983, no page numbers

²³ Northern Territory Museums & Art Galleries Board 1983, no page numbers

²⁴ Northern Territory Museums & Art Galleries Board 1983, no page numbers; Tyler 1993

proportions derivative of the classical style', citing it as 'Darwin's finest example of a "late twentieth century stripped classical" building'.²⁵

The site for the court building was approved in 1954 but bureaucratic delays meant that it was not constructed until much later and could not be used until the second half of 1965.²⁶ After then it was much used as the Territory's population rapidly increased. The number of judges and court staff members also grew and by the late 1980s it was clear that the court facilities were inadequate for the demands being placed on them. Provisions for the comfort of juries were particularly poor.



PLATE 18 *Former Supreme Court, Mitchell Street*

The building achieved national and international recognition during the trial there of Lindy and Michael Chamberlain in 1982 – perhaps the most discussed and controversial case in Australia's legal history. Though convicted of the murder of their daughter Azaria at Uluru, both

²⁵ Welke & Wilson 1993, 249

²⁶ Welke & Wilson 1993, 247–249



PLATE 19 *Northern Territory Parliament House, State Square*

maintained their innocence and several years later were pardoned. During the trial the Supreme Court was almost constantly the focus of media attention. John Bryson, author of a best-selling book on the case, commented that the grounds around it were 'grassy, and most of the trees are palms, spaced well apart like a new plantation on old ground'. He found the court house 'handsome' but 'tall fluted columns and dark glazing convey that the rooms inside are chambers of judgement'. Just inside the sliding doors, 'the corridor was thick with journalists. The common idea was to catch the arrival of the Chamberlains, then watch the session next door on the video.'²⁷ On the night of the jury's verdict, Bryson thought the building,

²⁷ Bryson 1986, 343

looked like a military Shrine for the Fallen. The crowd ... obliterated the forecourt and spilled on the footpath ... The glare came from luminaries, floodlamps mounted on grids, six of them, set to face the fastened doors.²⁸

The new Parliament House and Supreme Court buildings located nearby both continue a similar process. The fact that they are all located within a distinct 'precinct' is very important symbolically. In the rather flamboyant language of John Ruskin, the administrative and legal structures have been 'entrusted with the fame, and hallowed by the deeds of men'. Their walls have 'been witnesses of suffering' and their 'pillars rise out of the shadows of death'.²⁹ They are, in particular, part of a process that commenced in 1869 through which the Europeans in charge of Darwin both legitimised their occupation and ensured that Anglo-Australian rules of conduct were enforced. As in other isolated frontier regions, it was necessary to have structures that imposed colonial and administrative authority and from which administrative and legal tasks could be undertaken.

²⁸ Bryson 1986, 525

²⁹ Ruskin 1886, 186–187

3

Defeating distance

In *The Tyranny of Distance* the historian Geoffrey Blainey observed that, in understanding Australia's history, 'the idea of distance' provides many worthwhile explanations. In particular, he argued that the coming of mechanical communications and transport to Australia – the telegraph, steamships, railways, motor vehicles and aviation – shaped the continent's economic and social development.¹ Perhaps to an even greater extent than in other parts of Australia, the requirement to conquer distance and provide more effective means of communication had a very considerable impact on both the Northern Territory and its isolated capital.

The overland telegraph, as has already been noted, provided the new settlement at Port Darwin with a rationale for continued existence. It was not long before the telegraph line became a 'symbol of the Territory', a 'very useful reference point for public figures in South Australia and the Northern Territory to draw attention to themselves and their colony in the context of international politics'² for, from Darwin, in Blainey's words, 'a

¹ Blainey 1966

² Livingston 1988, 34

long line of telegraph poles stretched two thousand miles across the continent from north to south³ linking Australia with Europe.

Almost immediately opposite the new Parliament House, to one side of the Esplanade, is the site where the original cable was landed. It was here that on 7 November 1871 several hundred men from a fleet of ships anchored nearby brought the cable ashore from *Hibernia*, anchored about 800 metres out, and connected it to the telegraph instruments in the British Australia Telegraph Company cable room.⁴ The scene is described by Peter Taylor:

Signals were immediately exchanged with the ship and after a few toasts the men re-embarked and the *Hibernia* started off, paying the cable out behind her. It had all been so efficient and unhurried that it was a while before the inhabitants of Port Darwin, who had greatly enjoyed the performance, fully realised that the great cable that would join Australia with Europe was at last being laid.⁵

A much more obvious reminder of the cable link is a stone house further along the Esplanade now known as the 'British Australia Telegraph Company Residence' or 'Lyons Cottage'. Built in 1925, it is a single storey cottage with sleeping spaces on either side of a central open area. The kitchen and laundry are in a separate structure at the back connected to the rest of the house with a covered walkway. It was constructed for the Eastern Extension Australasian and China Telegraph Company Ltd, the successor to the BAT from 1873 (the name 'BAT', however, continued to be used), and was the residence of the company's engineer. From the Second World War it had a variety of uses, and was once a home for the prominent lawyer and local politician John Lyons. It is now a museum. The building plan, as Welke and Wilson have noted, is atypical in Darwin, being 'more reminiscent of English colonial models developed in India, Malaya and Singapore'.⁶ It is, appropriately, the only building left in Darwin which still has clear associations with the Asia to Australia telegraph link.

³ Blainey 1966, 223

⁴ National Trust 1992, no page numbers

⁵ Taylor 1980, 102

⁶ Welke & Wilson 1993, 263–265



PLATE 20 *British Australia Telegraph Company Residence (Lyons Cottage),
the Esplanade*

Sea transport was vital for Darwin during the period before the Second World War. Most supplies came on ships while many of those travelling to the town did so by sea. Some observers, though, believed that Darwin's port was poorly situated in regard to communication between the Northern Territory and the rest of Australia. The port, despite its importance for Darwin inhabitants and the ideal of the telegraph linking Darwin and the world, maintained only a precarious existence. Suggestions were made in the 1920s and 1930s that railways from Queensland and Western Australia might be more effective than the dependence on sea transport that motivated the town's original planners. Following the Second World War there was a major upgrade in the main road connections to the Territory. Wartime damage necessitated extensive redevelopment and rebuilding of the port and a separate Port Authority was created in 1963. Since then there have been major extensions to the wharf at Stokes Hill. New installations have also been constructed nearby. At Fort Hill Wharf there is a modern roll-on/roll-off facility. Today Darwin handles both general and bulk cargoes from interstate and



PLATE 21 *Darwin's port precinct, about 1930 (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

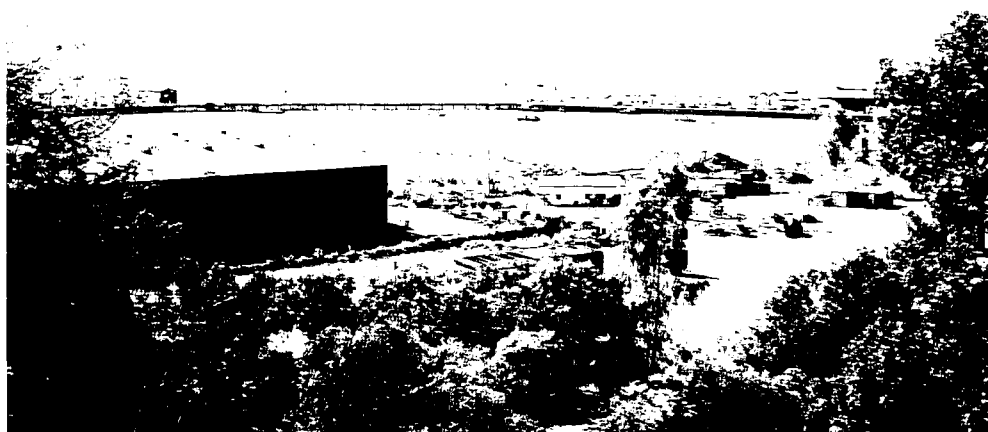


PLATE 22 *Darwin's port precinct, 1990s*

overseas with a small intrastate trade. In addition, prawn trawlers use the port as a base to export their catch.⁷ Darwin is now Australia's major live cattle export port. Nearby, Frances Bay is being developed as an extensive complex for fishing and marine-related industries. In spite of many physical changes, including the reduction in size of Stokes Hill and the reclamation of land for new facilities, the port is correctly regarded as one of the most significant of Darwin's historic precincts. It comprises the wharf at Stokes Hill, a steam pump house, underground fuel storage tanks and the historical archaeological remains of gardens, steps and a large house.

Stokes Hill Wharf has tubular steel piles, steel braces and horizontal struts. It is one of a succession of wharves built in the port area, the first of which was a half tide barge landing. The initial timber wharf collapsed in 1897. A steel jetty, constructed in 1903, served until the Japanese bombed it on 19 February 1942. The present steel wharf was finished in November 1956. Since then it has been extended and upgraded on several occasions. In 1992 it became the site for a tourist development, including shops and restaurants, though it is still used from time to time for berthing ships, including visiting ocean liners.⁸

Located close to the entrance of the wharf is a concrete structure with a corrugated galvanised iron roof that houses a steam pump used to pump heavy oil between ships and nearby storage tanks. Erected in 1928, it remained operable until it was decommissioned in 1988. The pump house has since been restored and is, from time to time, opened to the public. The building's significance is in its association with the fuel depot established in Darwin in 1924 and the fact that its construction technique through use of a surrounding high concrete wall was adapted to deal with the possibility of an accidental oil spill.⁹

Also close to the wharf are tank tunnels commenced in 1943 to contain underground fuel storage tanks that would be secure against bombing. Several were destroyed with the removal of Fort Hill in 1965 to make way

⁷ Bach 1976, 424–427

⁸ Welke & Wilson 1993, 282–283

⁹ Dermoudy 1989; Steinle 1991

for iron ore export facilities. Blasted out of the rock and lined with steel, they were never used for their intended purpose and are now a popular tourist attraction.¹⁰

Other sites in the port precinct include the place where the first public gardens were maintained, a walkway of concrete steps to the Esplanade and, most significantly, some scattered physical remains of the building known variously as 'Knight's Folly' or 'the Mud Hut'. Designed by John Knight, then a senior public servant, and constructed under his supervision in 1883 and 1884, it was his home until he became Acting Government Resident in 1890.¹¹ In early January 1884 the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* commented that Knight had,

designed a novel residence (the whole being built of concrete) and the first two-storied house erected in Palmerston. The site is not a happy one, being on the side of a steep bank, but as there was no better available within view of the sea there was no alternative but to take it. To suit the employment of the material used the building, when completed, will present some of the characteristics of the Norman style. The double verandah, having massive piers and arches all formed in concrete, so that little will be seen of the plain walls which now shows with somewhat undue prominence. The roof is flat, the first of its kind in Palmerston, and finished with an embattled parapet. The walls are 28 ft high, and the building when finished will be 61 feet in length by 88 feet in width.¹²

Timber was ultimately used in the upper verandah rather than the concrete first specified. Once completed, the new house became the most prominent feature of the port area's landscape and remained so until destroyed by fire in December 1933.¹³ It was then the boyhood home of Austin Asche who in 1993 became the Administrator of the Northern Territory.

The North Australia Railway, or the 'Never-Never Line', as JY Harvey described it, was an isolated narrow gauge line that connected Darwin with Birdum some 521 kilometres to the south. The railway commenced

¹⁰ National Trust, site file 6/366; Welke & Wilson 1993, 283–284

¹¹ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 50–51

¹² *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 5 January 1884

¹³ Carment, Wilson & James 1993, 51

in 1889 as the 233 kilometre Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway and linked Darwin with the southern goldfields as a component of the South Australian Railways system. Under Commonwealth ownership after 1911, the railway was much extended but never fulfilled its original ideal as a great north-south transcontinental line. The railway ceased operations in 1976, having sustained large financial losses but before then, it was a vital ingredient in Darwin's life. It provided employment and until the construction of the Stuart Highway was the only reasonably reliable transport link with settlements such as Adelaide River, Pine Creek, Katherine and Larrimah.¹⁴ The railway emphasised the social hierarchy of old Darwin but was also 'another centre of shared experience for all people in Darwin. All classes and races went on the railway – silvertails in the one first-class car, Aboriginal people in open waggons.'¹⁵

By 1976 Darwin possessed quite extensive railway facilities, including a line at the Stokes Hill Wharf, a station nearby on Frances Bay, petrol sidings, victualling sidings, a depot and workshops.¹⁶ A most prominent relic of the line today in Darwin and the only remnant of the former very large yards at the Darwin terminus, is the shed on Frances Bay Drive. It is steel framed, and its walls and roof are clad in corrugated galvanised iron with a continuous iron ridge vent to the roof.¹⁷ Originally on the site was a store where ships' cargoes were unloaded from the rail wagons, sorted and made available for collection. Next door was a goods area, complete with shed, crane and weighbridge. In 1934 the store burnt down and the present shed, more modern but less attractive, replaced it. During the early 1970s the yards were extensively rebuilt to cope with the iron ore traffic from Frances Creek, near Pine Creek. This involved demolition of the Darwin passenger station and cutting back the nearby cliff face.¹⁸

¹⁴ Harvey 1987

¹⁵ Sager 1993, 50

¹⁶ Harvey 1987, Appendix Four

¹⁷ Welke & Wilson 1993, 319–320

¹⁸ Harvey 1987, 309–310

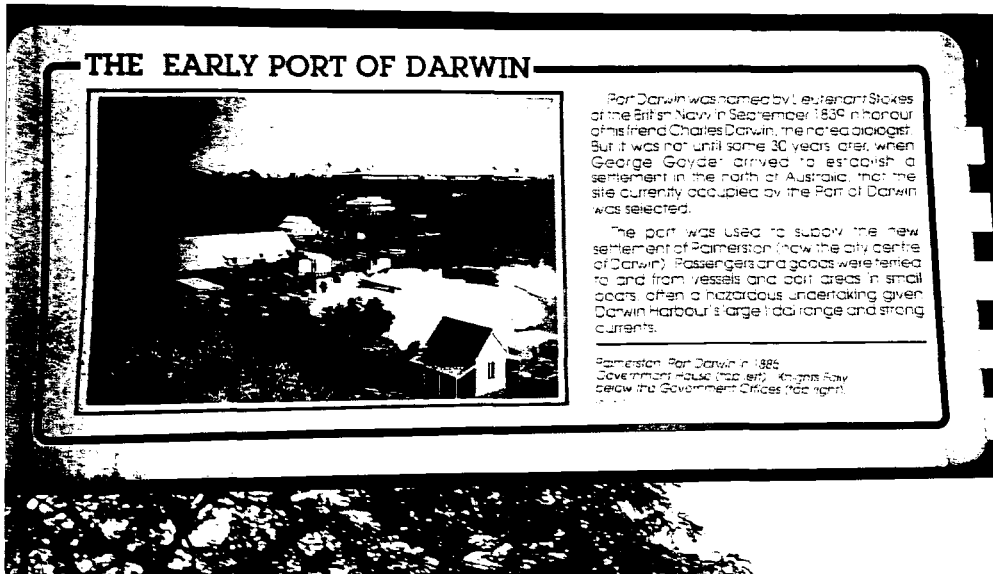


PLATE 23 Interpretation board at 'Survivors' Lookout' above Darwin's port precinct. 'Knight's Folly' is the large house near the centre of the photograph



PLATE 24 The locomotive Sandfly, Parap Workshops, Darwin. It was brought to Darwin in 1887 and used there until the Second World War (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)

Aviation broke the Territory's 'final barrier'.¹⁹ The growth of both Darwin and the whole Territory was enormously assisted through the development of commercial aviation between the 1920s and 1950s. Aircraft travelling between Australia and other parts of the world stopped in Darwin for refuelling and service, providing a boost to the local economy. In 1919 the well known aviator Hudson Fysh supervised the clearing of an airstrip in the suburb of Fannie Bay. Today the strip remains as a wide tree-lined street, Ross Smith Avenue. Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd (Qantas), which Fysh helped found, was established in 1920 and also operated out of Darwin. However, the present Darwin Airport was first commissioned as a Royal Australian Air Force base in 1940. Still a military airport, it also handles domestic and international flights and serves as a base for light aircraft operations.²⁰ Until 1991 the civil airport terminal was built into and around the frame of a Second World War hangar.

The old 'aerodrome' at Fannie Bay can 'be tied into almost every major event or major name in Australian aviation history'.²¹ A small monument at the seaward end of the former strip commemorates the achievement of Ross and Keith Smith in landing a small Vickers-Vimy aircraft there on 10 December 1919 after the first flight from Britain to Australia. The journey took 28 days. In Darwin there were great festivities. The historian Manning Clark later wrote: 'Hopes were running high for communications by air between Australia and the capital of the Empire. At the close of the Darwin banquet a lady kissed the aviators. Those present cheered.'²²

It was on the Fannie Bay strip that Bert Hinkler landed on his first major solo flight. Another to arrive there was Amy Johnson, the first woman to fly solo from Britain. It was also here that Qantas started its regular overseas mail service in 1934.²³ For those who grew up in Darwin during

¹⁹ Haslett 1981

²⁰ Haslett 1981, 54

²¹ Haslett 1981, 54

²² Clark 1987, 134

²³ Haslett 1981, 54

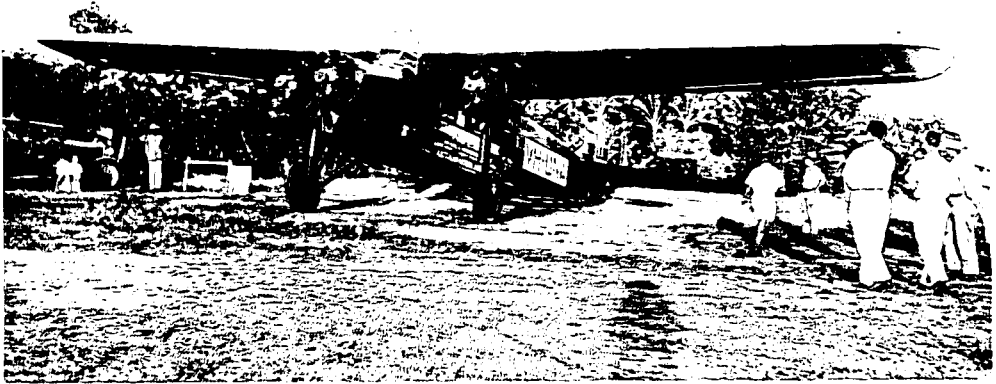


PLATE 25 *The Smith brothers' aircraft, Darwin, 1919 (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 26 *Monument to the Smith brothers' flight, Fannie Bay*

the 1920s and 1930s the arrival of famous aviators provided much excitement. A most treasured memory of Christa Litchfield, who was born in 1916 and lived in a house near the aerodrome, was having morning tea in Charles Kingsford-Smith's *Southern Cross* and chatting with his co-pilot, Scotty Allen.²⁴

The only physical evidence of the former aerodrome is a 1934 hangar at MacDonald Street, Parap. A large curved structure, the front of the hangar has a wide, tall entrance because four De Havilland DH86 aircraft could be accommodated at any one time. It still contains cannon holes and shrapnel scars from the Second World War. The hangar was erected primarily because of Qantas tendering successfully for the Australian Overseas Air Service between the United Kingdom and Australia which saw the development of international air routes opened with Qantas providing the Brisbane-Darwin-Singapore link. Sidney Williams Company constructed the new hangar in September and October 1934. At the time it was the largest in Australia and featured a steel internal structure with corrugated galvanised iron cladding. From then until the Second World War both Qantas and Guinea Airways flights used the hangar. It was a base for Air Force units during the Second World War and was badly damaged in Japanese raids. In 1946 the civil aerodrome ceased operations and the hangar has been used for storage purposes. The surviving aerodrome structure remains, though, as the most obvious feature of the first international airport at Australia's 'front door'.²⁵

The conquest of distance in Australia was 'easily achieved because all the resources of the Industrial Revolution were ready to hand'.²⁶ This was true even in the very isolated settlement of Darwin. Indeed, had it not been for the rapid technological advances in transport and communications that directly resulted from the mid nineteenth century onwards it is most unlikely that the town would have survived. Enough evidence of these advances survives in Darwin today to result in an 'outdoor museum' of various phases and aspects of transport and communications technology.

²⁴ James 1992a, 179

²⁵ National Trust, site file 6/335

²⁶ Jeans 1983, 119

4

Commerce and enterprise

Although it was established as an administrative and communications centre, Darwin has always had an important commercial and economic function. The first shops were set up very soon after the initial European settlement. Banks, hotels and small workshops soon followed. Today, there are the usual shopping centres, supermarkets and tall office and hotel structures that dominate most Australian urban centres. There is, however, comparatively little industry.

The oldest surviving retail building in Darwin is Brown's Mart which was completed in 1885, probably to a Knight design, as a warehouse for the prominent entrepreneur Vabien Solomon. Solomon, an energetic retailer who became a newspaper proprietor and a member of both the South Australian and Commonwealth parliaments (and, very briefly, South Australia's Premier), was a dominant figure in the Northern Territory. He was also a leading builder. Before the mid 1880s he had already constructed two large business premises, a retail shop and printing office in Smith Street, both built of cypress pine and corrugated iron with cement floors and fronts. His own house was reputed to be the most substantial in Palmerston.¹ Brown's Mart was described in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* in June 1885 as the 'largest and finest' store 'yet

¹ Saunders 1990, 265–268

raised in Palmerston'. In Smith Street, nearly opposite the Town Hall, it has high stone walls and a hipped roof. Ample provision was made for ventilation and light with thirteen large windows. The front doors and windows, which the *Times* noted were 'sketched by Mr Knight, architect', were designed to 'harmonize with the Town Hall without copying its details'.² Galvanised iron hoods shield the double casement windows. From the new building, initially known as Solomon's Emporium, Vabien Solomon directed his various enterprises.³

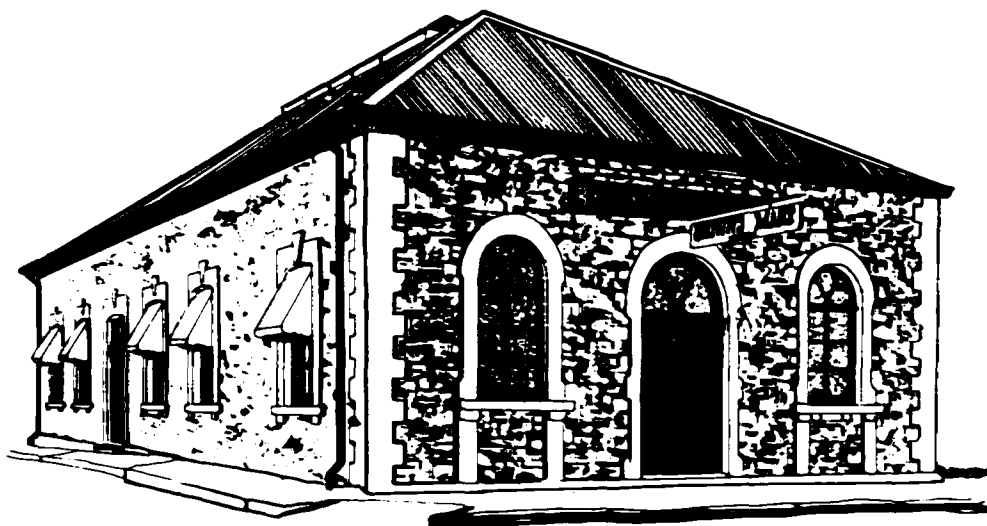


FIGURE 5 *Sketch of Brown's Mart (courtesy National Trust)*

Victor Voules 'Daddy' Brown, agent, auctioneer and mining entrepreneur, was associated with the building from 1887 until 1910. He had 18 children and was one of Darwin's most popular residents. A business he partly owned, Port Darwin Mercantile and Agency Company, used a section of Solomon's Emporium as a mining exchange, where mining samples were exhibited and mining meetings were held. Emanuel 'Man' Brown took over his father's interests in 1910. For a short time in the 1920s the well-

² *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 27 June 1885

³ Welke & Wilson 1993, 292

known trade unionist Harold Nelson operated an agency and auctioneering business from the premises. Later uses included a bank, a torpedo workshop, a naval store and government offices. Since 1970, when the building acquired its present name, it has been a community theatre, its interior being fitted out in the mid 1970s as the first purpose-built venue for plays in Darwin. It needed quite extensive restoration after Cyclone Tracy. Some of the building's wide variety of uses and its associations with significant personalities were celebrated in a special musical play performed there in 1984.⁴

At one stage, as discussed in an earlier chapter, there was a distinct area of Chinese shops in Darwin running along Cavenagh Street. Most of this was destroyed during and immediately after the Second World War. But one relic, the Sue Wah Chin Building, remains largely intact. Built as a group of five shops in 1888, its stonework, wall openings and iron bars on the windows mostly appear original. The hipped roofs and guttering were removed after Cyclone Tracy.⁵ The owner in 1993, the 93-year old Mrs Sue Wah Chin, belonged to a family that had purchased the building in 1926.⁶ Among the more prominent tenants was the Japanese-born businessman, community leader, inventor and pioneer of the cultured pearl industry in north Australia, Yasukichi Murakami, who had a photographic shop there during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Interned in 1942, he died two years later.⁷ The Sue Wah Chin Building stands as a monument to the contribution that he and other Asians made to Darwin's commercial development.

A more recent and quite different retail structure is a Knuckey Street shop now occupied by the retailer Murray Oakley. It has a prefabricated steel frame structure, corrugated galvanised iron cladding to the walls and roof, and an asbestos cement and glazed shop front. Its frame is that of a relocated Sidney Williams hut salvaged after the Second World War. Jimmy Ah Toy, a businessman of Chinese descent from Pine Creek,

⁴ Rich 1988

⁵ Welke & Wilson 1993, 174–176

⁶ National Trust, correspondence file 6/348

⁷ Kilgariff 1990, 216–218



PLATE 27 Sue Wah Chin Building, Cavenagh Street



PLATE 28 Chinese procession, Cavenagh Street, 1916 (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)

erected the structure in 1948 as a general store. Between then and 1963 the business traded as J Ah Toy and Company. Ah Toy himself commuted fortnightly between the store and his other shop in Pine Creek. He was a well-known figure, active in community affairs and in business and a founder of the National Trust in the Northern Territory. Ah Toy sold his Darwin business in 1963 to Murray Oakley, who set up the electrical goods shop which still operates. The building is one of many Sidney Williams huts used for different purposes in Darwin during the late 1940s but most of which have now disappeared. In the 1990s it was the only such hut being used for retailing in the city's central business district.⁸

On one side of the Smith Street Mall is a stucco arched facade that is all that remains of Darwin's oldest bank building, the Town and Country Bank, which occupied the site in the early 1880s.⁹ Originally this facade was part of a 'wide cloistered verandah to the Smith and Bennett Street boundaries leading to a substantial porcellanite stone banking chamber beyond'.¹⁰ When completed in August 1884, the bank greatly impressed Palmerston residents for it had 'a spacious corridor 12 [feet] having rusticated piers and elliptic arches with a string course cornice and parapet the whole moulded and finished in Portland cement ... in a style known as Renaissance'.¹¹

The Town and Country Bank collapsed in 1886 and the new Commercial Bank of Australia took over its business. The Commercial Bank started operations in 1887 in what was now known as the 'stone bank', to distinguish it from the 'tin' English, Scottish and Australian Bank further down the road. Except for a period during and immediately after the Second World War, the building remained a Commercial Bank branch until the early 1980s. The building was then, despite heated protests, largely demolished with only parts of the facade left.¹² The result, a large and ugly new office building with the older section at its base, is

⁸ Fisher 1992, 5–6; National Trust, site file 6/388; Welke & Wilson 1993, 166–167

⁹ Welke & Wilson 1993, 317

¹⁰ Welke & Wilson 1993, 316

¹¹ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 16 August 1884

¹² National Trust, site file 6/322; Welke & Wilson 1993, 316–318

generally regarded as an eyesore. Enough remains, though, of the original 'Renaissance' ornamentation to convey a sense of the way in which the bank must have appeared in rather stark contrast to other nearby structures.

The Westpac Bank, originally the Bank of New South Wales, is on the corner of the Smith Street Mall, opposite the former Commercial Bank. It is a two-storey rendered brick and reinforced concrete structure with a hipped corrugated iron roof. Though much altered over the years, parts of the external facade and roof form are much as they were when the building was completed in 1940. The architects were Frances R Hall and Harold M Cook from Brisbane and Louis S Robertson and Son from Sydney. The bank was evacuated after the bombing raid in February 1942 and very severely damaged in a later bombing raid that year. Visitors to the bank today can see photographs of the blackened shell of the building and the brass Bank of New South Wales sign scarred with bullets. Due to procrastination over the future form of the Darwin central business district, the bank was not fully repaired until 1955. It was later altered and additions were made. There were plans in 1974 to have the building demolished but these, fortunately, were not carried out. Instead, in 1978 there was a thorough refurbishment. The bank is now a reminder of Darwin's growth and developing economic needs in the late 1930s and early 1940s and part of a 'Banks Corner' precinct.¹³

Another of the 'Banks Corner' structures is the Commonwealth Bank, a two-storey reinforced concrete building completed in 1940. Although not badly damaged during the Second World War, it lost a lot of its roof, ceilings and windows. It reopened for business in 1944. Since then, it has undergone several additions and alterations. With the Westpac building across the street, it stands in the 1990s as evidence of Darwin's development just before the outbreak of the Pacific war. Designed in a pre-war 'art deco' style, it makes a distinctive contribution to the streetscape.¹⁴

¹³ National Trust, site file 6/322; Welke & Wilson 1993, 316–318; Tarhanoff Films nd (1940s); National Trust, site file 6/330; Welke & Wilson 1993, 183–185

¹⁴ Tarhanoff Films nd (1940s); National Trust, site file 6/334; Welke & Wilson 1993, 1–3



PLATE 29 *The Commercial Bank, corner of Smith and Bennett Streets, at about the turn of the century (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 30 *'Banks Corner'. The former Commercial Bank facade is on the left. To the right are the Westpac and Commonwealth Bank buildings*

Darwin's oldest and best known pub is the Hotel Victoria, part of which was completed in 1890. It is a two-storey structure on the Smith Street Mall built of porcellanite stone with wide verandahs and a gabled parapet wall on the Smith Street side. Originally known as the North Australia Hotel, it was renamed the Victoria in 1896 after the reigning Queen.¹⁵ The original owner and the licensee for many years was Ellen Ryan. With experience as a hotel keeper on the Territory goldfields behind her, at 'the Vic' she became known 'as one of the Territory's best hostesses, organising a variety of entertainments for her hotel patrons and local residents – including harbour excursions, picnics, shooting parties and fancy dress balls'. She also maintained a keen interest in local cricket and horse racing.¹⁶ According to a visiting Queensland journalist in 1904, Ryan conducted her hotel on 'eastern lines'. It was, Barbara James wrote,

a gathering place for every visitor to the Territory. This hotel was renowned for the number of derelict aristocrats it housed. That was the hey day of the 'remittance man', the black sheep of some aristocratic English family who had left England because of some indiscretion. They would drift about the East until stranded, usually at Singapore. Darwin offered the nearest sanctuary in Australia and there they remained stranded waiting for a remittance to arrive.¹⁷

The Commonwealth resumed the hotel in 1915 in a move that resulted from Administrator Gilruth's decision to take over the wholesale and retail sales of liquor in the northern part of the Territory. In an attempt to curb the Territory's alcoholism, the Vic was run as an accommodation venue only, a 'pub with no beer'. The bar only opened again in 1920 and in 1921 the colourful May Brown, known as the 'Wolfram Queen' due to her ownership of lucrative wolfram mines in the Pine Creek district, took over the hotel's lease. She very quickly gained a reputation for using pugilistic skills learnt on the mining fields to remove badly behaved hotel patrons.¹⁸

¹⁵ James 1990a; National Trust, site file 6/321; Welke & Wilson 1993, 168–170

¹⁶ James 1990b, 256

¹⁷ James 1990a, 8

¹⁸ James 1990a, 13–14; James 1990c, 43

In 1929 the Commonwealth sold the hotel to Christina 'Tanami' Gordon and members of her family. Another woman publican with a mining background, she took over the lease in 1926 and remained at the Vic until 1937. She began a tradition there which earned her the title, the 'aviators' mother'. Barbara James explained that,

As each early aviator passed through Darwin, often guests at the Vic Hotel, she would have them sign their names on what later became known as the 'aviators' wall'. Among the first and most cherished signatures were those of Charles Kingsford-Smith, Charles Ulm and Bert Hinkler. A portion of the wall still exists inside the Victoria Hotel complex in Darwin's Smith Street Mall.¹⁹



PLATE 31 *Hotel Victoria, at about the turn of the century (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

In 1946 the Lim family took up the lease. One of the most prominent Darwin Chinese families, they remained in charge until 1965. Alec Fong Lim, later to become a very popular Lord Mayor of Darwin, recalled that, 'The Vic was the social watering hole and the office to all the folks from

¹⁹ James 1992b, 71–72

the bush, the buffalo hunters, crocodile shooters, mining prospectors, as well as our local regulars, the NT News staff and the Banks staff, all in their white shorts and long white socks.²⁰ There were various owners after the Lims and in 1978, following cyclone damage, the building was extensively reconstructed to become a complex of shops, bars and other commercial outlets. It retained, nevertheless, the main features of its original exterior appearance and much of its character as a most significant element in Darwin's built heritage.²¹

A more recent but almost as well known pub is the Hotel Darwin on Herbert Street, a two-storey rendered brick and concrete structure with a distinctive canopy roof of blue Marseilles tiles. The building has undergone numerous additions and alterations, but, like the Vic, it has retained key elements of its initial appearance and character. Completed in 1940 to a design by Melbourne and Sydney architectural firm Stephenson and Turner, the hotel was the most luxurious and modern Darwin had seen. Its main role was to provide suitable accommodation for well-to-do travellers staying in the town and 'high standard' bar and dining facilities. It regained this role after the Second World War, during which the building had received some damage. By the 1970s, however, newer and larger hotels were starting to take over being the top 'upmarket' establishments and the Hotel Darwin became one of the better 'middle range' places to stay. Its famous 'green room' lounge bar has remained a favourite drinking spot for Darwin workers.²²

Not far from Casuarina Drive on the sea front near the boat ramp and jetty in the northern suburb of Nightcliff are some concrete slabs and steps that are all that are left of what between the late 1940s and the mid 1970s was one of the most popular of the hotels outside the central business area, the Seabreeze. The first hotel was built there in 1946 on the site of a naval observation post. A Sidney Williams hut and some smaller huts were used. A new hotel was built across the road in 1962 but was destroyed by Cyclone Tracy in 1974 and was, sadly, never rebuilt. The hotel began life under the proprietorship of Commander 'Chook' Fowler

²⁰ James 1990a, 19

²¹ James 1990a, 22–24; Welke & Wilson 1993, 170

²² National Trust, site file 6/345; Welke & Wilson 1993, 157–159



PLATE 32 *Hotel Darwin, Herbert Street*



PLATE 33 *Accommodation unit at Ludmilla Hotel (later Seabreeze Hotel) 1949*
(RL Hoath Collection, Northern Territory Library)

as a private guest house, the Darwin Tourist Hostel. In 1950 a private hotel licence was granted. Later names were the Ludmilla Guest House and the Ludmilla Hotel before in the late 1950s the name Seabreeze was adopted.²³ Despite very primitive accommodation, before the 1962 building was completed, the hotel was a favourite recreational venue for many Darwin residents, one of whom, Wendy James, later recalled that,

The setting was beautiful, like something out of a South Sea Island movie. You sat in chairs under the palm trees with the sea pounding against the rocks; or danced on the big red cement dance floor right on the cliff's edge; you almost expected Errol Flynn to appear on the scene.²⁴

Even if the new hotel lost much of the romantic atmosphere of the old location, it continued as one of Darwin's most popular drinking spots. According to its last proprietor, Mayse Young, 'It was a lovely tropical hotel, with an uninterrupted view of the Arafura Sea, and had a real family atmosphere.' There was comfortable accommodation set in beautiful grounds with a swimming pool and beer garden.²⁵ The remains of the hotel convey little if anything of its earlier atmosphere but for those who recall Darwin before Cyclone Tracy they still bring back many pleasant memories.

Darwin, as already noted, has little in the way of industry when compared with other Australian capitals. Yet between 1917 and 1920 and again for a few weeks in 1925 the Vestey Brothers, the British pastoral empire, operated an enormous meatworks at Bullocky Point in Fannie Bay. The last remaining structure of the meatworks complex is a concrete water tank, which the Darwin High School converted into a gymnasium and assembly hall. This tank is associated with perhaps the most ill-fated of all the Territory's economic ventures. The Commonwealth government authorised Vestey Brothers to build and run the meatworks in 1914. Because of wartime shortages of shipping, building materials and labour, strikes and government slowness in completing the Pine Creek to Katherine railway, the works did not open until 1917. Over the following

²³ Barter 1994, 35–41

²⁴ Barter 1994, 35

²⁵ Young & Dalton 1991, 168

few years the works operated for short seasons and made large financial losses. The tank was built as a water storage for the meatworks but was only used occasionally before the works became idle. The army occupied the site as a transit camp during the Second World War and the tank was used during this time. It was also used for various purposes after the war until being converted into its present role.²⁶

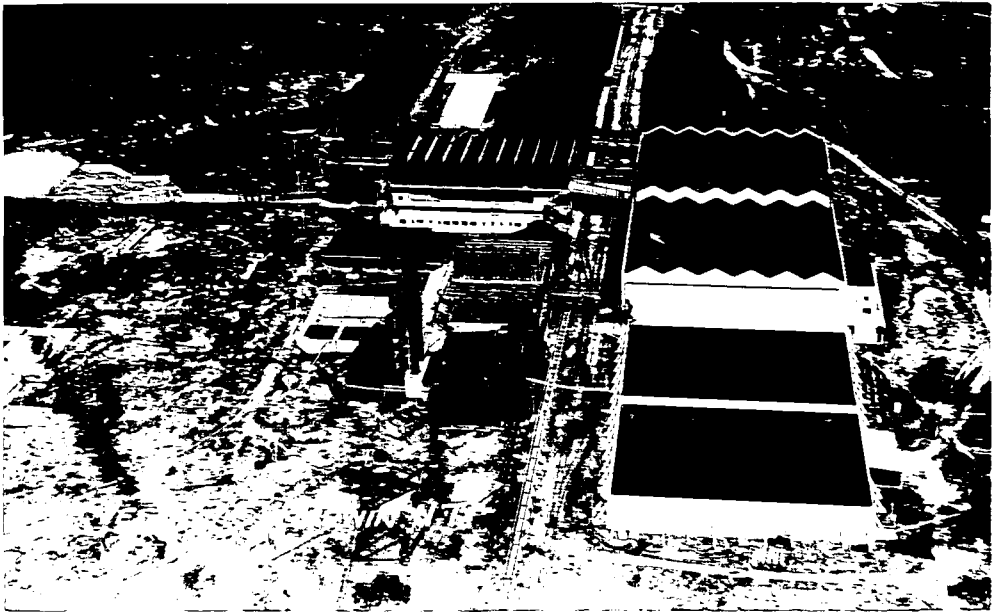


PLATE 34 Vestey's meatworks. Most remaining buildings were demolished in 1958 but the large water tank on the bottom right was retained (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)

The structures described in this chapter can all be viewed as evidence of Darwin's economic development. They provide information and examples of changes over time to important aspects of the ways in which both the government and private sectors attempted to meet the community's demand for particular necessities.

²⁶ National Trust, site file 6/332; Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory nd [1994], no page numbers

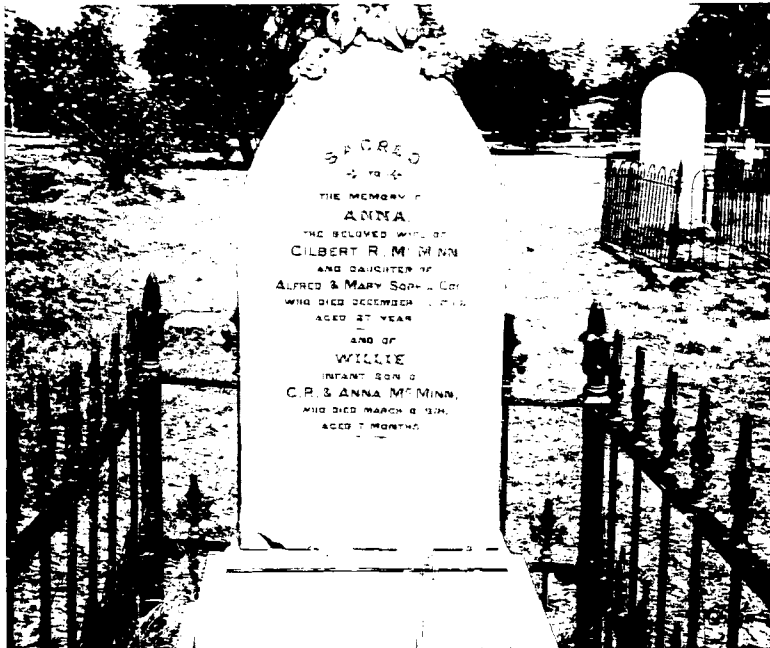
5

Servicing the community

Like most other regional centres in Australia, various colonial, local, Commonwealth and 'state' government agencies, community organisations and cultural and religious groups in Darwin have gradually provided an increased range of community services. While some were typical of those found in other towns and cities, others graphically reflected Darwin's remote location.

Darwin's oldest cemetery, the Palmerston Cemetery, is on Goyder Road. It is the burial place of many Darwin residents who died between 1870 and 1919. Among them are some notable figures, such as the police inspector and photographer Paul Foelsche and John Knight. There are various types of headstones, many of marble and stone and with epitaphs. Some Japanese are buried in the cemetery, including the famous pearler Charlie Japan. There are also Chinese graves. As is common in most cemeteries, there are far more graves than there are headstones and the register on a sign at the front does not present a complete record. Records maintained by the Darwin City Council commence in 1885 and document about 400 graves. The cemetery has been reopened occasionally since 1919 to allow burials in family plots, for example the Spain family and the Bell family. The cemetery is a most significant source for anyone interested in Darwin's social history.¹

¹ National Trust, site file 6/315



PLATES 35 & 36 Marked graves, Paimterston Cemetery, Goyder Road

More recent yet just as significant is the Gardens Cemetery, next door to the Botanic Gardens. It was in continuous use from 1919 to 1970 and was Darwin's main burial place during that period. There is a great range of graves, headstones and epitaphs. The Darwin City Council lists over 1200 graves. The first person buried there was Joss Villaflo, an infant, and there are many headstones for members of the Chinese and Greek communities.²

Located on Lambell Terrace is the former Darwin Hospital, now the Myilly Point Campus of the Northern Territory University. It was built by the Commonwealth government to the design of a Department of Works architect, E Henderson, to replace the first Darwin hospital erected above the appropriately named Doctors Gully. The siting of this new (1942) hospital was made possible by the destruction in 1937 of the Kahlin Compound, originally established in 1912 for the housing and 'supervision' of Aborigines in the town area.³

Included on the site is a complex of structures, some of which originally radiated out in a crucifix form from a central service core connected by covered walkways. Built of brick, the wards were designed so that large glass louvre windows provided ventilation and doors opened out to courtyards. Although greatly altered, this plan is still evident.

Also on the site, now used as student accommodation, is the three-storey building used as nurses' quarters. The external walls have a combination of asbestos cement louvres and glass casement windows. The building, though deteriorating, remains in almost original condition.

The hospital was barely operational when Japanese bombs attacked it on 19 February 1942.⁴ Only a day before it had received its first battle casualties when 11 badly wounded patients were admitted from a convoy that had been attacked on 17 February in the Timor Sea. As the Matron, Edith McQuade White, later recalled,

For a few minutes it was not realised by staff and patients that the armada of planes overhead was the enemy approaching. The sound of

² National Trust, site file 6/343

³ National Trust, site file 6/325; Welke & Wilson 1993, 322

⁴ National Trust, site file 6/325

bomb explosions and ack-ack fire soon disillusioned everyone. Patients were placed under beds and those who could, made their way to the long grass. Others scrambled to the few slit trenches which had recently been dug.⁵

The hospital was used for military purposes until May 1946, when it reverted to civilian control. The imposing nurses' quarters, now on the Commonwealth's Register of the National Estate, were constructed in 1952. Further operating theatres were added in the 1960s.⁶

The hospital staff performed magnificently immediately following Cyclone Tracy when they gave care to many casualties. The cyclone had damaged parts of the walls and roof and both electric power and water were cut but as Keith Cole remembered, 'the well-disciplined hospital was able to function with temporary repairs, emergency power supply, and its own water tanks'. Cole estimated that on the day after the cyclone between 500 and 1000 casualties were treated with 112 patients being admitted. 'Thirty-two cases', he continued, 'were operated on, in a non-stop effort by two surgical teams working side by side in two theatres for eighteen hours.'⁷

The hospital closed in September 1980 when a new Darwin hospital was established in the northern suburb of Tiwi. The buildings deteriorated until in 1986 they were rehabilitated to be used as the new University College of the Northern Territory, which became part of the Northern Territory University in 1989.⁸ The University is due to leave the site before the late 1990s when the lease expires and there is considerable apprehension regarding the fate of the old hospital buildings after then, especially following a controversial 1995 Northern Territory government decision to rezone much of Myilly Point for tourist development – a decision which overturned a Planning Authority recommendation against rezoning.

⁵ Grant 1991, 8

⁶ Welke & Wilson 1993, 322–323

⁷ Cole 1977, 39

⁸ Welke & Wilson 1993, 323



PLATE 37 *Nurses' quarters, former Darwin Hospital*

A very different health facility is the leprosarium at Channel Island, some 10 kilometres from central Darwin. Now the site of Darwin's power station, between 1931 and 1955 it was a home for sufferers of Hansen's Disease, almost all of whom were Aboriginal. There are the remains of many of the leprosarium's structures on the island, including dormitories, huts, a hospital, a clinic, a school, a well, a meat house, a kitchen, a recreation hall and a power station. Most are in very deteriorated condition. The Northern Territory Power and Water Authority, though, is committed to their conservation and use as an educational resource.⁹

Perhaps appropriately, the island is far from appealing. A noted archaeologist and historian, DJ Mulvaney, described it as 'remote and desolate'. 'Mangroves on its rocky perimeter screen its low, waterless interior. The horizon across the waters of Middle Arm is a vista of sombre

⁹ Northern Territory Department of Education 1990, no page numbers; National Trust, site file 6/331

green mangroves rooted in salt flats.¹⁰ Hansen's Disease, formerly known as Leprosy, today is curable but the medical and official response to it until the 1950s usually involved absolute segregation of those who had the disease in virtually uninhabitable places like Channel Island. The first diagnosed cases in the Northern Territory were Chinese but the main sufferers by the twentieth century were Aboriginal. The Commonwealth authorities established the leprosarium at Channel Island in 1931 on the site of a quarantine station. Police were empowered to find 'lepers' and bring them to the island. At least 443 lepers went there. The legislation dealing with Aboriginal lepers was particularly harsh and paid virtually no regard to their civil rights.¹¹

Once on the island, life for the lepers was tightly controlled. Many never left. The soil was poor and before long the island became even more desolate as most trees were cut down for fuel. The island was too small and barren for traditional hunting and gathering. Patients lived in small galvanised iron huts, some of whose remains are still evident on an exposed ridge. The few European patients received better quarters. Despite the hardships, the staff and patients organised social functions and there were regular fishing trips. In 1946 some patients waded off the island at low tide to petition the Chief Medical Officer for improvements to their living conditions and their protests did bring some positive changes. During the leprosarium's last years the rigid separatist policy was relaxed. Visitors were welcome and some patients were discharged. It was not, however, until 1955 that an outpatients policy was fully adopted.¹² The island today is not a place whose past attractions would make Aborigines feel nostalgic. However, there is a sense of 'spiritual connections with the unfortunate people who died there'.¹³

The first government school in Palmerston was established in 1879.¹⁴ With alterations and additions, it served until 1953, when a new school,

¹⁰ Mulvaney 1989, 195

¹¹ Mulvaney 1989, 195–197; Saunders 1989, chs 1–3

¹² Mulvaney 1989, 196–198; Saunders 1989, chs 4–5

¹³ Mulvaney 1989, 198

¹⁴ *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 29 November 1879

the Darwin Primary School, commenced operation. Situated on Woods Street, the school buildings of the 1950s include classrooms and rooms used for other purposes and some imposing trees surround them. The structures are mostly of concrete brick, partly one-storey and partly two. Welke and Wilson observed that the school buildings display 'a unique array of climatically determined detailing that became the adopted model for all later inner city schools, for example, Parap, Larrakeyah and Stuart Park'. The classrooms are, for example, open to the outside by double glazed doors with glass louvres above and were not air-conditioned.¹⁵



PLATE 38 *Part of the classroom area, former Darwin Primary School*

The school served the needs of children in the central area of Darwin and nearby suburbs until it was closed in 1983 due to declining enrolments. The Northern Territory government's decision to shut the school down caused much protest, particularly from prominent members of the Chinese community who had been educated there. Since then the school buildings have been used for various purposes, mainly as offices for the education authorities.¹⁶

¹⁵ Welke & Wilson 1993, 308–310

¹⁶ Based on my own memories of the events described, in which I was actively involved.

The Darwin Botanic Gardens cover quite a large area between the central business district and Fannie Bay. They now include many different types of vegetation, much of which is exotic, as well as an orchid house, a nursery and areas of lawn intersected by walking paths. Next door is a sound shell used for concerts. The Botanic Gardens have long been a site of major botanic, agricultural and recreational activities with Darwin residents using them widely for weddings, picnics and a host of other functions.¹⁷

The Gardens were established on their present site in 1883 after several experimental gardens in other places proved disappointing. The first curator appointed by the Government Resident was the German-born and Russian-educated Dr Maurice Holtze. By 1887 he could list more than 400 plant species as successfully established. After his move to the Adelaide Botanic Gardens in 1891, Maurice Holtze's son Nicholas succeeded him in Darwin. Nicholas remained in charge until his death in 1913. Despite the destructive cyclones of 1897 and 1937 and a big fire in 1902, the Gardens continued to be developed. The war proved another setback but again the gardens recovered. At the time the Darwin Council took over control of them in 1957, they were often thought of as the town's most attractive feature.¹⁸ In 1970 a local journalist, Kim Lockwood, wrote,

On the ... side of Gardens Road are the Botanical Gardens; acres and acres of sweeping lawns, lily ponds, giant trees of all shapes and sizes, and rare tropical plants. The gardens are a rendezvous for the people of Darwin for picnics, barbeques, concerts and simple sightseeing ... Nearby is the sound shell, which must surely be one of the best sited concert bowls of its kind in Australia, with sloping hills leading away from the stage in such a way that everybody lounging on the lawns can see what is going on.¹⁹

Over three-quarters of the trees in the Botanic Gardens were lost in Cyclone Tracy. The fern house, the nursery and the Holtzes' cottage were also destroyed. Again, there was a rapid recovery, particularly under the

¹⁷ National Trust, site file 6/1426

¹⁸ Brown nd

¹⁹ Lockwood & Roberts 1970, 50–53



PLATE 39 *Darwin Botanic Gardens* (Northern Territory Library
Northern Australia Collection)

curatorship of George Brown. Brown did a lot to popularise the Gardens and, in the process, became a prominent Darwin identity. He used his popularity to good effect when in 1992 he was elected Lord Mayor. New features of the Gardens in the post-Cyclone era included a palm garden, a kiosk-restaurant, playgrounds, park lighting, picnic and barbecue areas and a rain forest gully. Most tourists in Darwin visit the Botanic Gardens, which are now held in national and international esteem.²⁰

Another traditional venue for recreational activities was the Darwin oval, now an area of lawn opposite the Hotel Darwin and to one side of a park that runs along the Esplanade. Until after the Second World War it was the only public sports venue in the town. It was not replaced until the 1950s. During the 1930s it was the Darwin home for Australian Rules football, controlled by the Northern Territory Football League (NTFL) and the most popular football code. Don Dickson wrote that in the late 1930s the oval was laid out near the town centre, on a strip of parkland overlooking the waters of Port Darwin.

It had been regraded and enlarged for the 1937–38 season, but there was no turf, and roughly-mown grass covered a pebble-strewn, porous red soil. Even in the wet season a fierce sun could bake it hard enough to rasp the skin from falling players. An iron-roofed grandstand had no weather protection from back or sides, but there were new dressing sheds. Players now had the luxury of lavatories and two showers for each team room, serviced by water from a windmill-filled overhead tank. To the disappointment of eager boys, a new six-metre wire fence prevented footballs from falling into the rocks or the sea below.²¹

During football seasons, the local newspaper, the *Northern Standard*, had team lists, match descriptions, articles containing football gossip and reports of NTFL meetings. There was deep-seated animosity, based to a large extent on race, between two football clubs, the Buffaloes, most of whose players were 'coloured', and the Waratahs, most of whose players were whites.²²

²⁰ Brown nd; National Trust, site file 6/1426

²¹ Dickson 1987, 388

²² Dickson 1987, 388–389

On one side of the Smith Street Mall is the facade of the former Star Theatre, a cinema. Behind it today are some offices and an arcade of shops but for many years there was a partly roofed air motion picture theatre that played a most important place in Darwin's cultural life. Retained is all that remains of the cinema, a facade constructed of reinforced brick and concrete and a balcony supported on cast iron columns and a steel beam.²³

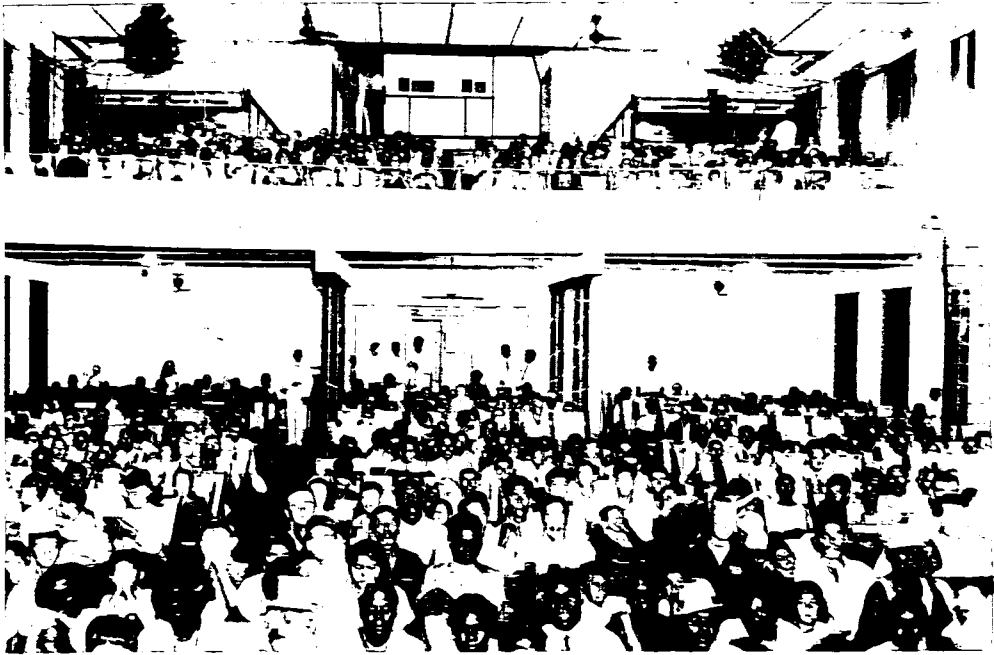
Harold Snell, Darwin's most prominent builder of the time, owned the land on which the cinema stood and was responsible for its construction. It opened in September 1929 and had seating for about 860 people. Christina Gordon of the 'Vic' Hotel bought the cinema a year later. The manager for much of the 1930s and 1940s was Tom Harris, a colourful local identity known widely as 'Tomaris'. A man of many talents, between films he would come out on to the stage and sing songs, play the ukulele and perform a variety of musical acts. All Darwin's social and racial groups attended films at the Star, but, as Charles Brister has pointed out, a line between classes and races was reflected in the seating arrangements. Public servants and business people, the 'silvertails', usually sat on an upstairs balcony, working class whites tended to sit at the back of the theatre downstairs while Aborigines and part-Aborigines sat at the front near the screen. The films shown at the Star during the 1930s were enormously popular. Not even wet weather deterred many members of the audiences.²⁴ One resident, Jessie Litchfield, recalled that 'if the fall was not too heavy, we sat still in our seats, and pulled an empty deck chair over our heads, peering out from the shelter of the canvas at the film'.²⁵

The Star resumed operations after a three-year interruption in 1946, still under Harris's management. He took over as owner in 1951 and the cinema remained in operation until Cyclone Tracy. On 3 January 1955 the Star gained a place in Australian film history when it screened the world premiere of Charles Chauvel's famous film 'Jedda', much of which had been shot at Northern Territory locations. Huge crowds gathered outside

²³ Welke & Wilson 1993, 186–188

²⁴ Brister 1993, 1–13

²⁵ Sager 1993, 34



*PLATE 40 Star Theatre, May 1933 (from the archives of the
Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 41 The facade of the former Star Theatre, Smith Street Mall

to see the arrival of the film's stars and over a thousand people crowded into the theatre itself. As he had done often before, Harris had the Star specially decorated for the showing. On the walls were grass mats and Aboriginal weapons. Harris died in 1973. His son, also Tom Harris and for some years a Territory parliamentarian and cabinet minister, took over management of the cinema and after the Cyclone turned much of the Star into a small shopping village.²⁶

Christianity came to Darwin with the first European arrivals. In the early years the small population could only support a few places of worship, with the Catholics and Methodists dominant. The latter built the first Protestant church in 1873. After the severe cyclone of 1897 destroyed this, a new iron clad church was constructed in Adelaide as a prefabricated structure and was dismantled and shipped to Darwin and reassembled on the site of the original church. Although no longer used as a church and in a deteriorated condition, it still stands on Knuckey Street.

Raised on low stumps, it has cypress pine framing and a corrugated iron hipped roof. The building displays some innovative features designed to resist cyclones, including chains attached to each corner of the roof that anchored the church down to concrete pads. Next door was the former manse built in 1938. The church continued being used until 1960. From 1945 it was a 'United' church, bringing together Presbyterians and Congregationalists with the Methodists. For many years it was an essential element of Darwin's cultural life. Residents, including some non-Europeans, were christened and married there. It was also frequently used for funerals. Its ministers were engaged in an almost ceaseless struggle for adequate resources from church administrators 'down south'. Arch Grant, the historian of Methodism in the Northern Territory, saw the building as having considerable symbolic significance, representing, among other things, the tension between church members 'on the frontier' and their distant leaders.²⁷

Darwin's Catholic Cathedral, Saint Mary Star of the Sea, stands on a site in Smith Street part of which the Catholic church has used since 1884. The cathedral has a rectangular plan with transepts enclosed by a steel arch. The rest of the walls are of porcellanite stone. It is a big building which dominates the streetscape.

²⁶ Brister 1993, 13–17

²⁷ Grant 1990; National Trust, site file 6/341; Welke & Wilson 1993, 160–162



PLATE 42 *Former Methodist church (to the left) and manse, Knuckey Street*



PLATE 43 *Darwin's original Catholic church, Smith Street, completed in 1888 (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*

Completed in 1962, local church leaders believed that the cathedral would at once be of a distinctive 'contemporary' style as well as being adapted for tropical conditions. It is the largest of Darwin's religious structures.²⁸ It received some damage during Cyclone Tracy and on the night of the Cyclone was the scene of a spectacular Christmas Eve Midnight Mass. Bishop John O'Loughlin recounted,

Going ahead with the Mass was probably the wrong thing to do. But we didn't realise that at the time. Instead of the 1,500 people we'd normally have at midnight Mass we had about 300, but the choir and so on was there. At 20 minutes past midnight the power was cut off by the electrical authorities because lines were coming down. It interfered with our celebration of the Mass somewhat. There was no electricity for the organ or public address system – so the people were spared a long sermon from their bishop. We finished Mass by candlelight. There was a lot of water in the Cathedral and windows were crashing and breaking as the Mass hurried to a close.²⁹

Darwin's current Chinese temple is on the corner of Woods and Bennett Streets. A comparatively recent structure, it was built in 1978 to the design of the talented local architect Peter Dermoudy. It is, though, a reinterpretation in steel and concrete block of a much earlier joss house on the site that was used from the late nineteenth century until 1948. The stone bases of its columns, the altar's masonry block and the stone lions all predate the present structure. It serves the needs of many local Chinese and is a popular tourist attraction.³⁰

A most crucial service provided to the Darwin community during the twentieth century was electricity. The town's first, rather primitive, power station did not come until 1922. The Darwin Town Council took over the reticulation of power in October 1935 from a power station in Cavenagh Square (about where Lindsay Street meets Woods Street). In 1937, following the abolition of the Town Council, the Northern Territory Administration took over the electricity supply and started to plan for a new power station at Stokes Hill. Today's power station is a huge complex at Channel Island but still much better known to many long time

²⁸ National Trust, site file 6/1410; Welke & Wilson 1993, 40–144

²⁹ Cole 1977, 156–157

³⁰ Welke & Harris nd [1981], 10; Welke & Wilson 1993, 189–191

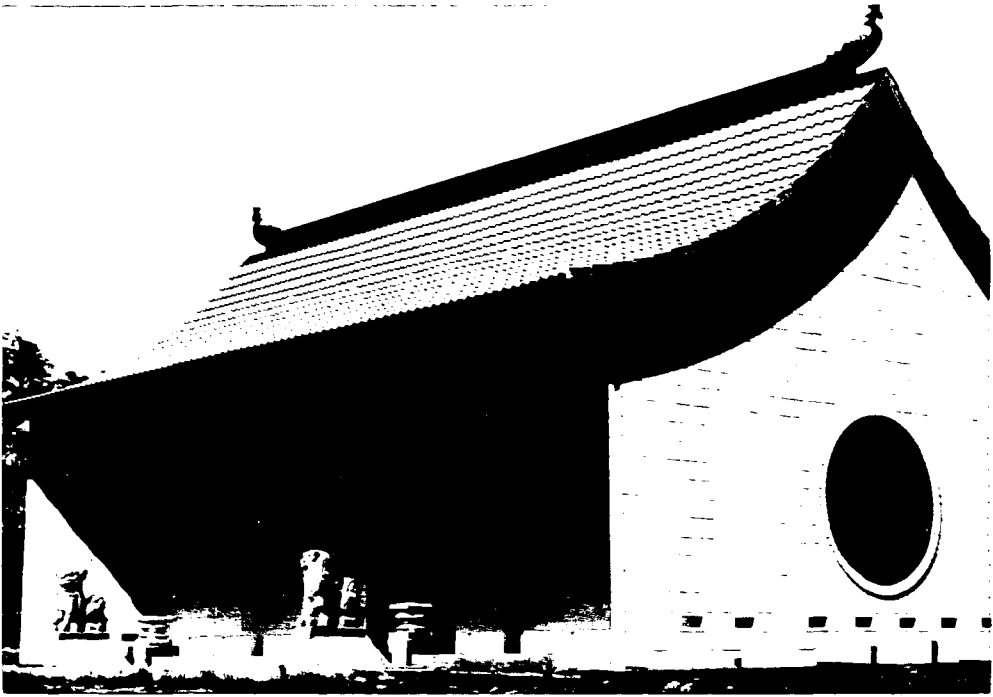


PLATE 44 *Chinese temple (Northern Territory Library
Northern Australia Collection)*

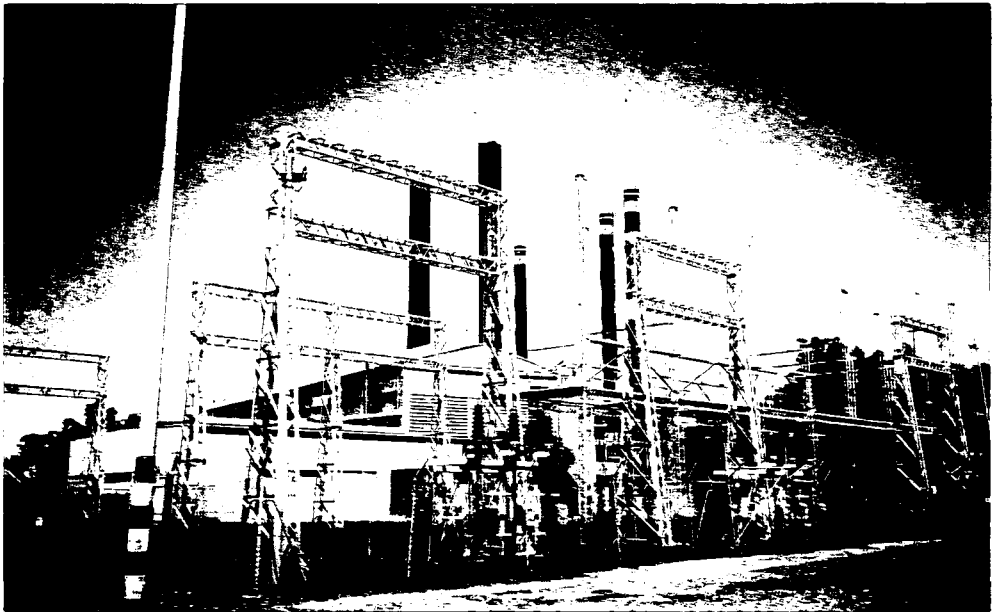


PLATE 45 *Stokes Hill Power Station*

residents is the former power station at Stokes Hill, which dominates part of the Darwin skyline. The complex includes a building that enclosed power generating equipment, at the rear are tall exhaust chimneys. The power house came into service in June 1940 and remained in operation, with improvements in its capacity, until it was closed in 1987.³¹ It was not always as efficient as it might have been for even in the early 1980s it was not capable of providing the city with a completely uninterrupted power supply.

Structures such as the Stokes Hill Power Station and some others described in this chapter are often not aesthetically pleasing. Yet both individually, and collectively, they tell us much about some widely varied services that over time were provided to Darwin's inhabitants. They help define the characteristics of what a group of noted American geographers once described as 'ordinary landscapes'. The geographers wrote that interpretation of these landscapes, however, 'will demand more than can be seen at a mere glance and a concern for more than the palpable objects themselves'.³² The structures discussed here are expressions of cultural values, social behaviour and individual actions worked upon their particular localities.

³¹ Welke & Wilson 1993, 269–270

³² Jackson, Lewis, Lowenthal, Meinig et al 1979, 6

6

Darwin's home

Over 40 years ago the controversial architect and author Robin Boyd published the first edition of his now classic work *Australia's Home*. The book documented the history of the Australian domestic house, its builders and occupiers. Australia, he argued, had more privately owned houses per head of population than most other countries and, while collectively they were an outstanding achievement, individually they left much to be desired. They were, simultaneously, a material triumph and an aesthetic calamity.¹ In the 1968 edition of the book, Boyd noted the trend in which more and more Australians were living in flats and home units but contended that much of this type of accommodation could also be strongly criticised on aesthetic and practical grounds.²

Boyd, perhaps not surprisingly for a Victorian, made no reference at all to Darwin. Moreover, as the prize-winning Darwin architects Philip Harris and Adrian Welke, from Troppo Architects, pointed out, Boyd's 'major steps of stylism' – the Italianate, Boom Style, Queen Anne, California Bungalow and Spanish Mission styles of Australian domestic architecture – never gained currency in Darwin.³ They argued that until the 1960s and

¹ Boyd 1968

² Boyd 1968, 296–305

³ Harris & Welke 1982, 17

1970s there were many examples of housing in Darwin in which good basic principles were established for coping with climatic and economic peculiarities. Moreover, these were sometimes also aesthetically pleasing.⁴ By the 1970s, though, 'with the common availability of air-conditioning and a whole host of new wonder materials for the changing social and economic structure of the region to deploy in building, the very principle, forms and architectural devices that had previously been so characteristic had clearly begun to disappear'.⁵ Cyclone Tracy, which resulted in strict new rules for housing, accentuated this trend. Yet since the early 1980s, Darwin housing design has again started to reflect earlier styles. Darwin's residents, Harris and Welke wrote, were 'once more becoming responsive to climate and landscape resources'.⁶

Almost all of Darwin's early dwellings, often built of timber, iron and bamboo, have disappeared, though there are some which survive from the first half of the twentieth century that are still in their original locations. One of the earliest of these, although its future seems most uncertain, is a small corrugated iron residence on the Esplanade. With timber frames, it is set on low concrete stumps. It has a central gabled room with extensions to the front and rear. The enclosed front and rear verandahs were a consequence of building regulations that specified minimum eight feet verandahs on the two long sides of the structure. Almost certainly built in 1924, the structure remains, in the opinion of Welke and Wilson, 'in near original condition incorporating the evolutionary adaptations made to the building over its life'.⁷ For many years the building was the home of George Taifalou, a member of Darwin's Greek community and it still belongs to his descendants. It is, Welke and Wilson have argued, 'exemplary of the standard of private residence construction common in early twentieth century Darwin development'.⁸

⁴ Harris & Welke 1982, 5–17

⁵ Harris & Welke 1982, 17

⁶ Harris & Welke 1982, 18

⁷ Welke & Wilson 1993, 9

⁸ Welke & Wilson 1993, 10



PLATE 46 *An early Darwin house of timber, iron and bamboo (from the archives of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory)*



PLATE 47 *Former Taifalou residence, the Esplanade*

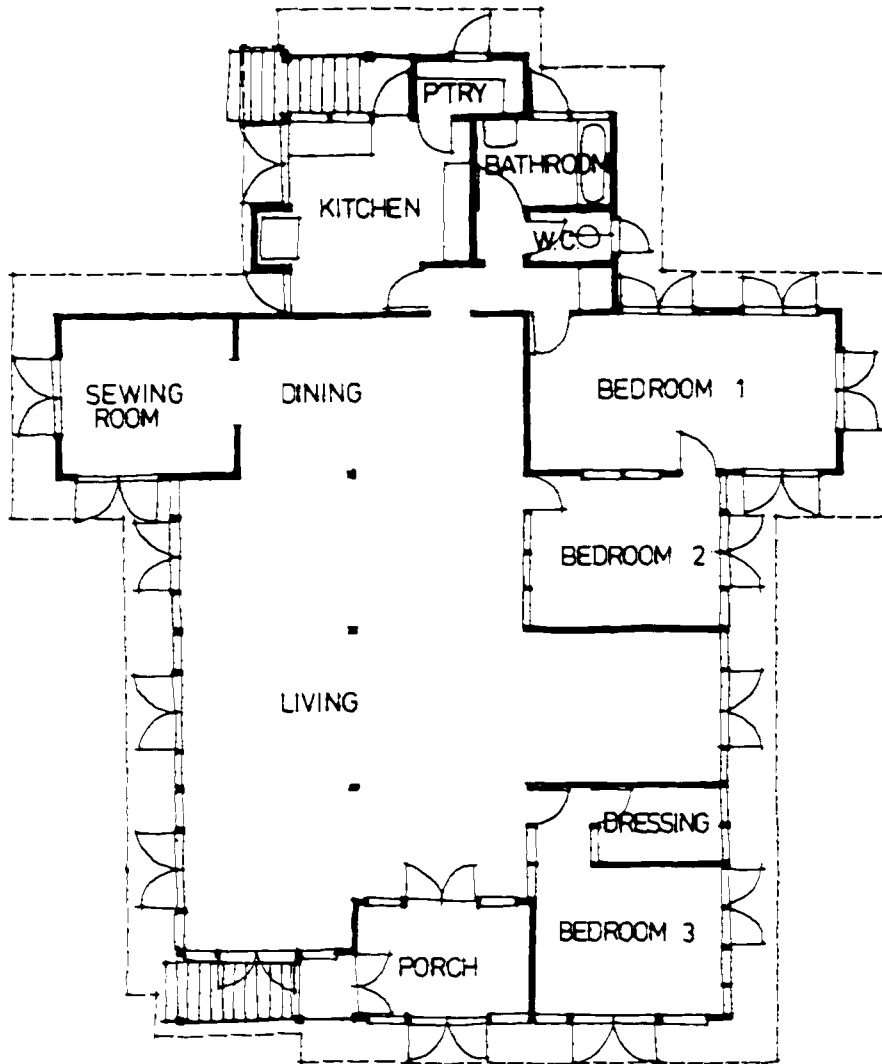
Much grander is the precinct of four elevated houses at Burnett Place (formerly part of Temira Crescent) on Myilly Point built as residences for senior government officials between 1938 and 1939. They are now under the control of the National Trust. The Giese residence is a four-bedroom timber frame and asbestos cement home on round concrete piers. Next door is Burnett House, now the National Trust headquarters. Also with four bedrooms and constructed of concrete, timber and cement it has two storeys. Further along the road are two more four bedroom elevated timber frame and asbestos cement residences.⁹

The architect for all the houses was Beni Burnett. Born and trained in China and with architectural experience in Singapore, Burnett also studied architectural techniques in Europe, North America and Japan. In Darwin he was a government architect and was directed to design high quality 'tropical' housing for executive public servants and military personnel. The houses at Myilly Point, with the exception of Burnett House which combines upstairs sleeping with downstairs living areas, are elevated with bedrooms grouped around or to the side of a central living area. All incorporate 'the use of asbestos louvres together with glass casement windows to provide fully screened walls that could be adjusted to allow for maximum air flow, internal three quarter height room partitions, and steeply pitched roofs'. 'The radical Burnett designs clearly influenced by the traditional and colonial architecture of Southeast Asia, were geared to achieve maximum ventilation and living space.'¹⁰ His houses were well suited to the Darwin climate and his long-term influence on local architecture was extensive. Now being carefully restored under the National Trust's supervision and located in an area with extensive tropical vegetation, the Myilly Point houses form one of the last remaining precincts of 1930s government housing still intact in Darwin.

The Giese residence has been the home since 1954 of Harry Giese, an influential and prominent figure. As the Director of Welfare for many years he was responsible for the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory and, in particular, the application of the

⁹ Cook 1990: National Trust, site file 6/342; Welke & Wilson 1993, 11–21

¹⁰ Gibson 1992, 23–24. Also see Bridgman 1994.



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FLOOR PLAN

MR H.C.GIESE RESIDENCE,

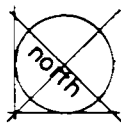


FIGURE 6 Floor plan, Giese residence, Myilly Point (courtesy National Trust)

assimilation policy. Although sometimes controversial, he won widespread respect for the conscientious and effective manner in which he undertook his duties. After his retirement from the public service he became active in a variety of community organisations. His wife Nan was President of the Arts Council of Australia's Northern Territory Division and is the second Chancellor of the Northern Territory University. Together the Gieses created a magnificent tropical garden around their house, widely considered the most beautiful private garden in the Northern Territory.¹¹ The garden,

provides the visitor with vistas of trees, shrubs, ferns and climbing plants to delight the eye at every turn... The garden was almost totally destroyed by Cyclone Tracy in 1974 providing an opportunity for extensive re-planning... The garden was planned to provide shade and coolness, colour and scents and to attract the many birds which flock there in large numbers.¹²

Members of the public can visit both the house and the garden on special open days.

For most of the period between 1939 and 1974 Burnett House was the home of successive Directors of Works in the Northern Territory. After the bombing of Darwin, however, it was taken over by the military and it was also damaged by a bomb blast and badly infested with termites. By July 1947 nearly £1500 had been spent on its rehabilitation. Cyclone Tracy badly damaged the house and it stood empty for some years until restored by the National Trust in the mid 1980s.¹³

Most of the emergency accommodation that was rapidly built in Darwin immediately following the Second World War has gone. One example, however, remains in Westralia Street, Stuart Park, part of what was known as Parap Camp. It is a steel Sidney Williams hut with propped eaves and shuttered windows.¹⁴ For many years it was the home of the Christodolou family, who lived in one half and had a general store,

¹¹ Watson 1984; *Who's Who in Australia 1993 1992*, 524

¹² Watson 1984, no page numbers

¹³ Welke & Wilson 1993, 15

¹⁴ Welke & Harris nd [1981], 21



PLATE 48 *Burnett House, Myilly Point*



PLATE 49 *Former Christodolou house, Westralia Street*

serving the needs of other Parap Camp residents, in the other.¹⁵ There were at one stage about 15 of these huts on or near Westralia Street, most with interiors like Maisie Austin described in the first chapter. There was such a shortage of accommodation, Austin remembered, 'that families squeezed as many of their relatives as possible in the one hut, otherwise, people had to find alternate accommodation until a hut became vacant'.¹⁶ The families, she continued,

planned their own rooms – how much to divide, where to put the bedrooms, where to have a sitting room. The location of the taps decided where the kitchen was to be... All partitioning of the rooms was mainly masonite sheets over timber frames. The room walls were about eight feet high. Each bedroom doorway had either an old makeshift door or [was] just curtained off. Families did their own carpentry work, their own painting and patched up small holes with chewing gum.¹⁷

It was not until the early 1960s that some inhabitants of the Parap Camp could move to better quality accommodation. Despite the hardships, Austin and many other former residents of the camp retained many happy memories of the place and were determined that the surviving hut be preserved. As she wrote in 1992,

The hut occupied by the Christodolou family still stands in Westralia Street and when I drive past, I wonder how it housed five adults and a grocery store. I look beyond the hut and "see" the huts in the background and the kids playing on the dirt road and I drive out of the area with "goose bumps" all over me.¹⁸

For the more fortunate, usually non-Aboriginal, members of the community better standard housing was built in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In many cases, such as the residence at 3 Mangola Court, Larrakeyah, built in 1949, the government provided homes for its own employees and their families. An elevated two bedroom, timber frame and asbestos cement house on concrete piers, its windows are a

¹⁵ Austin 1992, 49–50

¹⁶ Austin 1992, 12

¹⁷ Austin 1992, 12–13

¹⁸ Austin 1992, 63



PLATE 50 *Residence, 3 Mangola Street*

combination of casements and fixed louvres. The house is in almost original condition with only minor enclosing of the underneath section. One of the first government residences completed in the inner suburb of Larrakeyah after the war, it is a simple yet attractive building of a type that did much to relieve the postwar housing demand.¹⁹

A private house built a year later is not far away at 11 Lambell Terrace. It has five bedrooms, is elevated on concrete piers and is of timber and asbestos. Charles Houngh On was the first owner. The builder was Snells Contracting, the largest building company in Darwin at the time and responsible for much of the postwar reconstruction work. Its founder, Harold Snell, was a remarkable individual who was a primary producer, carpenter, miner and soldier before he went into the building business.

¹⁹ Welke & Wilson 1993, 46–47

The house is a reminder of the role that his company played during a particularly difficult phase in Darwin's development.²⁰

Not everyone who worked for the government was assigned a house. Some in the early 1950s lived in blocks of flats, such as one at 30 Woods Street. A two-storey concrete building with a corrugated iron roof, it was completed in 1950. Initially these flats, each built for a family with one child, were allotted to day labourers with the Department of Works and Housing. Later they were also available to other public servants.²¹

Throughout Darwin during the 1950s and 1960s the government built numerous new homes in suburbs such as Fannie Bay, Parap and Stuart Park to keep up with Darwin's rapidly expanding population. Examples can be found in various parts of the city and there is a precinct at the Royal Australian Air Force Base that is observed from Bagot Road. In their original form these elevated houses had unpainted asbestos cement wall cladding with banks of full height louvres of metal and glass and external flywire. Planning was linear to allow for cross ventilation, with an airy perimeter corridor linking the bedrooms. The houses were usually just one room wide with overhead fans assisting ventilation. The large open space underneath allowed for relaxed living in the evenings and ideal play areas for children.²² In spite of their many admirable features, they did not, as discussed in the first chapter, withstand Cyclone Tracy particularly well. They were often poorly built and they were difficult to brace effectively as they generally lacked expanses of wall except at the gable ends. 'This style of house', the Australian Housing Research Council found, 'had generally performed poorly in the worst-hit suburbs with noticeably more complete damage than did low-set examples.'²³

Better-off residents were also seeking homes that suited local conditions. In 1957, for example, the internationally famous Sydney architect Harry Seidler designed a home for members of the wealthy Paspaley family,

²⁰ Fletcher 1992, 194–197; Welke & Wilson 1993, 38–39. Other blocks were later built nearby.

²¹ National Trust, site file 6/1423; Welke & Wilson 1993, 138–139

²² Cole 1977, 13; Welke & Harris nd [1981], 26

²³ Cameron McNamara, Milliken & Western 1983, 1–21



PLATES 51 & 52 *Government built homes which are typical of designs widely employed in the 1950s/60s. Top: The Narrows. Bottom: Fannie Bay.*



PLATE 53 *Paspaley residence, Myilly Point*

whose fortune mainly came from pearling. It was built a year later and still stands on Myilly Terrace. A two storey residence, it is mainly of concrete with an iron roof and large precast concrete louvres. Large walls of glass, shaded with a big verandah, capture the sea view while the louvres provide protection against the hot western sun. The double roof encourages ventilation and cooling. The house won the Royal Australian Institute of Architects House of the Year Award in 1960. It only received minor damage in Cyclone Tracy.²⁴

The house is one of very few in Darwin that epitomises some main features of what Philip Drew described recently as Australia's 1950s 'architectural vision'. Seidler, Drew contended, was part of a movement that believed that its revolutionary designs would transform the old world. Often credited with introducing 'Modern architecture' to Sydney, Austrian-born Seidler had been influenced by the ideas of the Bauhaus design school in Germany and Walter

²⁴ Saini 1970, 42; Welke & Wilson 1993, 206–207

Gropius, under whom he studied at Harvard University in the United States. The Paspaley residence is in many respects a particularly good example of Seidler's Australian houses of the 1950s and early 1960s. Like some of his Sydney designs, it makes extensive use of glass, transparency and dynamic free flowing space. Gone was the familiar pitched roof. For many in the Darwin community the Paspaley residence must have appeared as a dream dwelling – for those who could afford it, the house of the future.²⁵

Following Cyclone Tracy there was an unfortunate reaction against some more innovative and sensible aspects of Darwin's domestic architecture. Between 1975 and 1977, 'the Darwin Reconstruction Commission decided gun-turret-type tactics would be necessary to combat the one year in 40 ravages of cyclonic activity'. The attitude, in the words of Harris and Welke, was reflected in the 'Tracy trauma' houses which are so pervasive in the northern suburbs of Wagaman, Wulagi, Moil, Anula and Tiwi.²⁶ The general response to the now paramount design for cyclonic conditions was an emphasis on the use of masonry and precast concrete in construction. Extensive louvred walls gave way to isolated glazed panels, generally of 'hopper' windows, and planning 'became more cellular and claustrophobic'.²⁷

Within a decade, though, many Darwin residents realised that although the 'Tracy trauma' housing might withstand another big cyclone, without air-conditioning the houses were most uncomfortable. The ground level houses did not pick up the prevailing breezes which were blocked by trees and other houses; the masonry construction heated by the sun acted like a storage heater at night rather than cooling down after sunset; the small windows did not open to the full extent of the available window space.

A positive sign of the future came in May 1982 when a village of entries in a Territory government 'low cost' housing competition opened in Darwin. As a requirement of construction, houses were all to cost no more than \$34,000 each. Government houses at the time cost between \$45,000 and \$48,000 to build. The most controversial of the structures built yet the one that also had the greatest subsequent influence in Darwin, was Troppo Architects' 'Green Can'.

²⁵ Drew 1993, 92–93 & 97–98

²⁶ Welke & Harris nd [1981], 30

²⁷ Harris & Welke 1982, 18



PLATE 54 'Tracy trauma' housing in Anula (elevated)



PLATE 55 'Tracy trauma' housing in Wulagi (ground level)

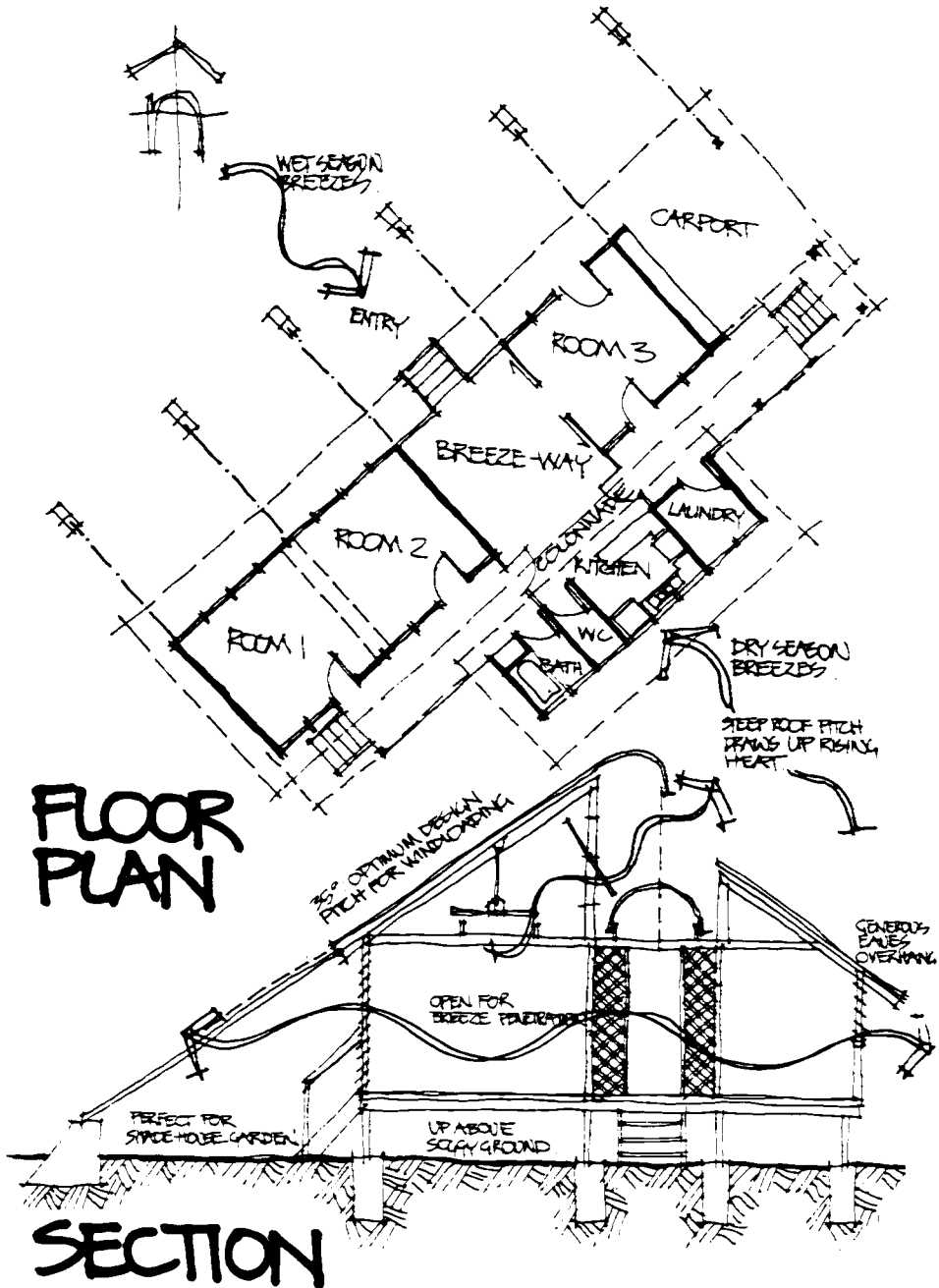


FIGURE 7 Floor Plan of 'Green Can' home (Harris & Welke 1982, 57)

The architects claimed it had no precedent in earlier local versions of tropical housing yet was 'also deliberately derivative of the local architectural vocabulary, a product of the selective employment of historically developed climatic design principles'.²⁸ The mainly iron and timber 'Green Can', an example of which can be found in the suburb of Karama, is slightly elevated with three bedrooms occupying the entire width of the main part of the structure and lots of louvres. A steep pitch roof draws up the heat and there is a generous overhang of the eaves.²⁹ Several architects and builders in Darwin have since employed these basic principles. Others have included large verandahs in their houses. Much more attention has been given to landscaping, even if, as noted in the first chapter, this frequently involves the use of exotic plants that require much watering.

Many blocks of flats and home units built since the early 1980s have not been sensibly designed, being ugly and impractical and sometimes very exposed to the fierce afternoon sun. But not all can be described in such a way. There are now many instances of blocks that are quite pleasing in appearance and provide comfortable living. Along Casuarina Drive in Nightcliff, for example, there are three and four storey blocks where most rooms are exposed to the sea breezes, there are wide balconies, windows are large and ceilings are quite high. Many blocks are painted in light colours to radiate some of the intense heat.³⁰

Darwin's homes provide a most informative body of historical evidence. They have been associated with a great range of human activities. They tell us about such matters as the availability of building materials, about the ideas and methods of their designers and builders, about class, race, status, lifestyles and much more. Perhaps most particularly, they allow a consideration of an important part of the process in which settlers from various parts of the world modified their cultural values to suit new and very different conditions. 'The history of Australian colonial settlement', Graham Connah argued, 'is written into its houses.'³¹ A similar observation can be made about the dwellings of Darwin from the 1920s onwards.

²⁸ Harris & Welke 1982, 55

²⁹ Harris & Welke 1982, 55–57

³⁰ Based on my own recent observations.

³¹ Connah 1988, 83



PLATE 56 *Troppo Architects designed residence, Coconut Grove*



PLATE 57 *Block of home units, Casuarina Drive*

7

Australia's front line

Since the late nineteenth century Darwin's location has always been considered of strategic value. White Australian fears of an Asian invasion have usually focussed on the continent's north, particularly from the 1930s when Japan loomed as a potential threat. Today the city's population includes many armed forces personnel and there are significant defence bases located in the city area.

Among the early evidence of this is the Darwin Mobile Force (DMF) precinct that is part of the Larrakeyah Army Base. Four buildings remain which date from 1936 and they were probably brought from Thursday Island in Queensland in 1932 and 1933. The store/workshop contains early details. It is steel framed, corrugated iron clad and prefabricated. The other buildings have been substantially altered but together all the buildings are important as the oldest at the Larrakeyah Base.¹

The DMF was the first regular field force unit raised in the Australian Army in the whole country. Though relatively short lived (November 1938 to September 1940) and small in number, the DMF made vital contributions to the training and staffing of the second Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The unit's first accommodation in Darwin was in

¹ National Trust, site file 6/353

the disused Vestey's meatworks at Bullocky Point and its tasks included the construction of tactical roads, the erection of barbed wire defences and guarding oil tanks.²

Much more elaborate and extensive is the military fortification complex at East Point. Work there commenced in 1932 and continued in stages until the end of the Second World War. Now under government protection and open to the public, the complex contains a great variety of structures intended for the defence of Australia against northern attack including emplacements for nine inch guns, observation bunkers, command posts, magazines, communications towers, entrenchments, stores and associated facilities.³

The East Point site is closely associated with important historical events. In 1932 the Commonwealth government announced its intention to fortify Darwin and, in particular, protect its oil depot. During 1933, barrack buildings at Thursday Island were dismantled and shipped to East Point and nearby Emery Point. A couple of six-inch guns were also installed at East Point, with associated magazines, observation towers and stores. Further improvements were made between 1938 and 1942, including the installation of more six-inch guns, four-inch guns, nine point two-inch guns, machine gun posts, barracks, various ancillary buildings and a labour camp. After February 1942 the work stopped and tools and materials were moved to Berrimah to prevent them from falling into Japanese hands in case of invasion. The nine point two-inch guns were finally completed in 1945. Not one shot was ever fired at an invading enemy. Ironically, the guns were sold as scrap metal in 1960 to a Japanese salvage company. At the end of the war many buildings were also sold.⁴

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base at Winnellie is a large area containing a diverse precinct of buildings. Some of these date from 1937. Building styles at the Base cover a wide range of designs and functions.

² *Darwin Mobile Force* 1989, 1–2

³ Dermoudy & Cook nd [1991]

⁴ Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory nd [1992]a, 3; Dermoudy & Cook nd [1991], 1–18

The oldest structures were carefully designed to cope with local conditions. They represent what could be described as a 'Pacific war' architectural style built in lightweight form. Most of these buildings have corrugated iron roofs supported on timber frames with asbestos cement panelling. Many are elevated on concrete piers. They feature large areas of louvres to provide cross ventilation. Other buildings are of corrugated iron, aluminium and brick.⁵

There are several buildings of particular note. The administration building was completed in 1940 and retains much of its original detailing. Use of the 'functionalist' form of architecture adapted to the tropics is seen in the gymnasium and canteen. The Burnett-designed commanding officer's residence is an excellent example of this gifted architect's work. The married officers' quarters are typical of late 1930s housing in Darwin and provide further evidence of the way in which the defence build-up increased the town's population.⁶

Japanese bombers and fighters strafed the Base in the first air raid on Darwin. The sole defence came from 10 United States Air Force fighters under the command of Major Floyd Pell. Most of these aircraft were shot down and Pell himself was killed. Later more Japanese bombers attacked the base, causing very extensive damage. At the Base two hangars and the main store were burnt out, the recreation hut, some airmen's blocks and the hospital were badly damaged and several other buildings were damaged to a lesser extent.⁷ The Base hosted some 75 units during the war years. Following the cessation of hostilities it was used to coordinate the return of RAAF units scattered throughout the Dutch East Indies.⁸

The Larrakeyah Army Barracks also provide evidence of increased emphasis on northern defence just before the outbreak of war in 1939. Work on them started in 1937, with significant elements being added between 1939 and 1942. Plans of the original Larrakeyah Barracks are based on the principles developed by Walter Burley Griffin, the architect

⁵ National Trust, site file 6/344

⁶ National Trust, site file 6/344

⁷ Alford 1991, ch 2; Powell 1988, 83–87

⁸ Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory nd [1992]a, 9

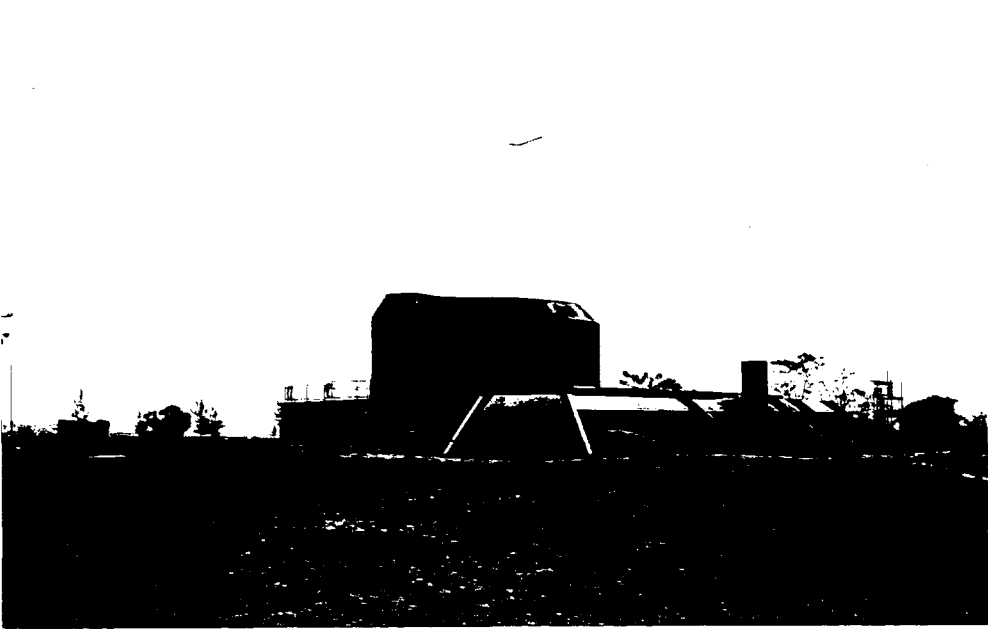


PLATE 58 *Gun emplacement, East Point*

of Canberra. Griffin was particularly skilful in handling space, which for him was living and three-dimensional, formed by walls, floors and ceilings. Perhaps the most noteworthy structure is the 1940 Burnett designed sergeants' mess, a two-storey concrete encased steel frame with infill panels of louvres. Another Burnett design is the 1940 headquarters building. It has a single storey of reinforced concrete and originally had an asbestos cement roof. Built in 1939 are two storey concrete encased steel framed structures which housed private soldiers and junior non commissioned officers. They have infill panels of shutters enclosing louvres. Ground floors contain bathrooms and locker rooms and on the first floors are sleeping quarters. The other ranks' mess, another 1939 building, is a two-storey concrete encased steel framed structure with infill panels of shutters enclosing louvres. The ground floor contains a kitchen and dining rooms and the first floor a recreation area. There is a single storey reinforced concrete guard room with office accommodation and prison cells about an exercise room.⁹ The Larrakeyah base remains

⁹ Freeland 1972, 247; National Trust, site file 6/307

the Army headquarters in Darwin but is now too small to house all the city's soldiers, many of whom now live at the new Robertson Barracks near Palmerston. The Larrakeyah precinct is currently a joint Army and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) operational area. Among its various roles, it serves as the headquarters for the RAN's northern patrol boat operations.¹⁰

The Army in Darwin, Alan Powell argued, 'came out best' among the three services in the attacks on the 19 February 1942. Army anti-aircraft gunners maintained a high volume of fire and were quite effective. Larrakeyah Barracks suffered from machine-gunning but there was only slight damage and casualties were light. Soldiers' behaviour following the raids, however, was much less praiseworthy. They moved into the central area of Darwin where they systematically looted houses and businesses. The Seventh Military District Headquarters staff at Larrakeyah, Powell reported, left the barracks early on 20 February, 'lurked in the bush all day for fear of air raids and returned "rather shamefacedly" the same night when the expected raids did not come'.¹¹ The Administrator of the Northern Territory, Aubrey Abbott, later remarked that it was difficult to explain why the looting went unchecked for so long. 'The onus for this', he stated, 'must lie on the commanding officers of units who were camped close to the town and who apparently did not attempt to control their men.'¹²

Within the Larrakeyah base is a precinct of buildings at Emery Point. Not far from an old lighthouse, itself of much interest, there are three magazines and the remains of bunkers and fortifications, most of which were constructed in the late 1930s. Each magazine is partly below ground level and comprises two concrete rooms. They are significant as items of military design.¹³

As part of the late 1930s defence works many military strongpoints were constructed along the coastline north of Darwin. Two can be easily visited

¹⁰ Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory nd [1992]b, 13

¹¹ Powell 1988, 87–89

¹² Abbott 1950, 94

¹³ National Trust, site file 6/357

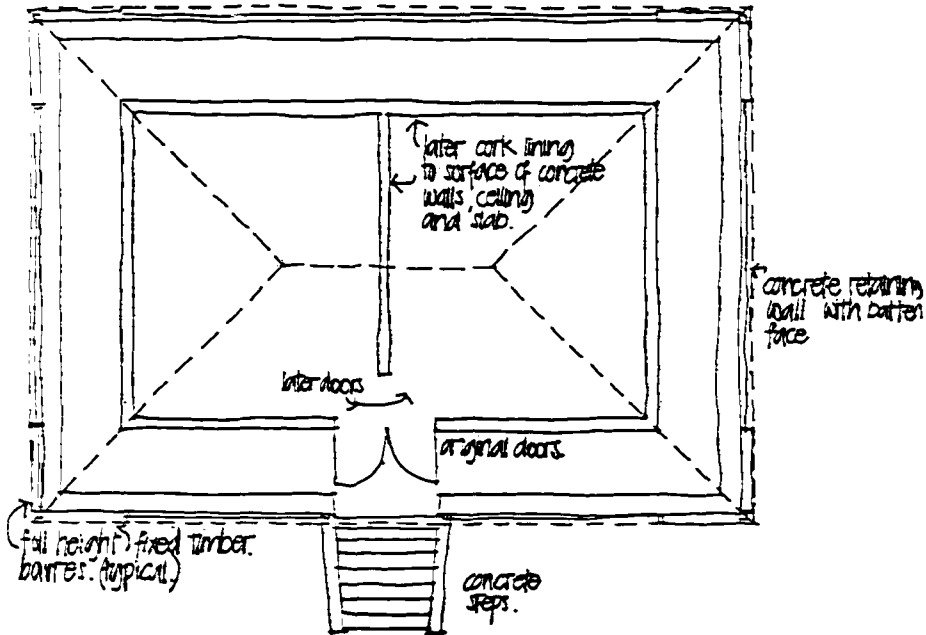


FIGURE 8 Plan of magazine at Emery Point (courtesy National Trust)

on the popular Casuarina Beach, although the more northern of the two is in poor repair. Built as observation posts in 1939, the concrete walls were designed to withstand all but a direct hit from enemy guns. The siting of the defensive positions along the beach was undertaken by

the Commanding Officer 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, Lt Col Anterell in company with a 23rd Brigade officer on 7 December 1941. Personnel of 'D' Company 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion were assigned the defence of the area extending from Micket Creek in Shoal Bay to Ludmilla Creek. Vickers machine guns were mounted in the strongpoints. 'D' Company moved to battle stations on 14 December and, despite the climate, tidal ranges and insects, maintained a constant watch out to sea.¹⁴

At Doctors Gully two naval round steel fuel oil tanks encased in concrete and on a concrete base remain. The tanks were erected just before and during the war to store heavy fuel for the bunkering of ships. An oil pipe

¹⁴ Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory nd [1992]a, 6

connects them to the Darwin wharf.¹⁵ It was also from Doctors Gully that Catalina flying boats engaged in long range mining and bombing raids. The RAAF's air-sea rescue launches were located here. Following the end of the war, Doctors Gully was used as a departure point for aircraft involved in the repatriation of Australian prisoners of war from Singapore and nearby islands.¹⁶

Structures such as those at Doctors Gully illuminate Darwin's vital war role, on what Alan Powell later described as the 'shadow's edge'. They and the other places discussed in this chapter are all part of the evidence of the first occasion in the history of European Australia when 'some part of its people faced the full impact of modern war: destruction, dispossession and the blind sweep of Death'. In that sense, Powell stated, it is the only war most Australians have had.¹⁷

¹⁵ Welke & Wilson 1993, 273–274

¹⁶ Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory nd [1992]b, 12

¹⁷ Powell 1988, xi

8

Preserving whose past?

Elements of Darwin's present cultural landscape are of considerable value. Although its built heritage has suffered greatly because of cyclones, a war and demolitions, enough is left to illustrate key themes. Darwin's structures reflect a continuing struggle to provide basic amenities of life and a gradual improvement in general living standards. There is a physical record of the responses of succeeding generations of people to remoteness and an often harsh environment.

Only since the 1970s, though, has this started to be widely appreciated. A National Trust in the Northern Territory was only established under an Ordinance, later an Act, of the Legislative Assembly in 1976. It now has a small professional staff, an active Darwin Branch and maintains a comprehensive register of significant places, including many in Darwin. The Trust applied strong pressure on the Territory government for comprehensive heritage legislation and the *Heritage Conservation Act* was passed in 1991.¹

Several conservation battles were fought along the way. There were always some politicians and residents in the Northern Territory who contended that there was little need to preserve many of Darwin's historic

¹ Carment 1984; Carment 1991a; Sullivan & Carment 1992

buildings and areas. To do so, they maintained, would harm the prospects of economic growth. They felt that the city's continuing prosperity depended on almost unrestricted commercial development of that part of the urban area where most of the oldest evidence of the past was found.

A particularly crucial episode took place during 1984. Early in that year the Country Liberal Party Territory government announced that it believed Federal Pacific Hotels, which managed the casinos in Alice Springs and Darwin, had failed to make them sufficiently profitable and that, after suitable compensation was paid, control would be transferred to a new consortium in which two overseas casino groups would play an important role. The change of control also involved planned large scale redevelopment, including construction of a new casino, at Myilly Point in Darwin. Many local residents became alarmed that the Burnett designed precinct of houses on the point would be demolished or removed.²

On 10 July the Australian Heritage Commission, an agency of the Commonwealth government, announced that the precinct had been placed on the Register of the National Estate. Two of the houses then belonged to the Commonwealth government and one each to the Territory government and the National Trust. A furious Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Paul Everingham, accused the Heritage Commission of being 'sneaky and underhanded' and stated it had 'declared war on us'. On the other hand the Territory Opposition's shadow Minister for Community Development, Brian Ede of the Australian Labor Party, argued that Everingham was greatly embarrassed by his earlier commitment during 1983 to honour any Commission decision on preservation of the houses. The Commission Chairman, Dr Ken Wiltshire, stressed that proper procedures were followed.³ On the following day Everingham turned his anger on the National Trust, which he claimed was in 'collusion' with the Heritage Commission. He stated, incorrectly, that three of the houses were derelict and dangerous. 'What is at stake here', he stressed, 'is a project involving 1600 jobs – the Trust and

² *Northern Territory News* various issues for May and June 1984

³ *Northern Territory News* 10 July 1984

the Commission have done the dirty on us and tried to box us into a corner ... Now all bets are off. We are at war.'⁴

There was widespread support for the preservation of the Myilly Point houses. A very well attended protest meeting beside the houses condemned the government's redevelopment proposals. When the Minister for Community Development, Daryl Manzie, suggested that the houses could be moved with other historic structures into a 'heritage park' well away from land with development potential, the National Trust Director, Penny Watson, responded that 'the Government would make a Disneyland out of our history if it proceeds with this plan ... If four houses which represent such a tiny part of the total site can jeopardise the whole project and 1600 jobs the development plans must be very tenuous indeed.'⁵ The protests forced a reluctant government back-down. A special working party was established to consider the houses' future. The party included National Trust and Heritage Commission representatives and by the end of the year the threat to the precinct was lifted.⁶ Everingham's very sympathetic biographer, Frances Chan, subsequently wrote that the argument over the Myilly Point houses 'was one of the few battles with the public that Paul Everingham lost, or at least eventually backed off from'.⁷

The 1991 *Heritage Conservation Act* obviously represented another significant step forward but it is not as strong as some would wish and even in 1992 problems were emerging in its functioning and administration.⁸ In particular, the Heritage Advisory Council, established under the Act, proved reluctant to use some of its powers. During November 1993 a significant Darwin structure, a former Chinese temple and club in McMinn Street, was illegally demolished with no action being taken against the owners, who had previously advised Conservation

⁴ *Northern Territory News* 11 July 1984

⁵ *Northern Territory News* 18 July 1984

⁶ Carment 1985, 309–310

⁷ Chan 1992, 117

⁸ Sullivan & Carment 1992

Commission officers acting for the Council that the building was safe.⁹ A month later the National Trust applied for Interim Conservation Orders under the Act to be placed over two properties under possible threat, the Sue Wah Chin Building and the former Methodist church and manse. The applications were rejected. Regarding the Sue Wah Chin Building, the Trust was advised that 'following discussions between Government Ministers and the representatives of the owners, the Minister has put other arrangements in place'. As far as the church and manse were concerned, the owner, the Uniting Church, had given a 'firm verbal undertaking' that 'no destruction of the property would occur without consultation'.¹⁰ Ultimately, in July 1995, after much discussion involving all interested groups, the church was listed under the *Heritage Conservation Act* as a Heritage Place.

Though much has been achieved in the protection of Darwin's historic environment in recent years, these incidents show there is obviously no room for complacency. Continuing public education is absolutely vital. The importance of leaving (whenever possible) the evidence of Darwin's history where it belongs and has a function particularly needs to be stressed. Since the early 1980s many of Darwin's older houses have been moved from their original locations and taken to rural blocks outside the city. Although this is certainly preferable to demolition, much of the houses' significance has now gone. They have lost a great deal of their meaning. As DN Jeans and Peter Spearritt argued in their stimulating book *The Open Air Museum*, cultural artefacts and structures 'are best seen and appreciated *in situ*' where their appearance and order are the result of 'a combination of human demands and spatial influences'.¹¹ The case is strong in Darwin for preserving as 'open air museums' particular structures and areas.

As for what exists today as a cultural landscape that non-Aboriginal people can easily recognise, the Aboriginal impact on Darwin's built environment has been small, largely restricted to such elements as stone fish traps. This view is, of course, misleading in that it ignores the

⁹ Welke & Wilson 1993, 128–129

¹⁰ National Trust, correspondence file 6/348

¹¹ Jeans & Spearritt 1980, 138



PLATE 59 *Part of the Myilly Point heritage precinct*

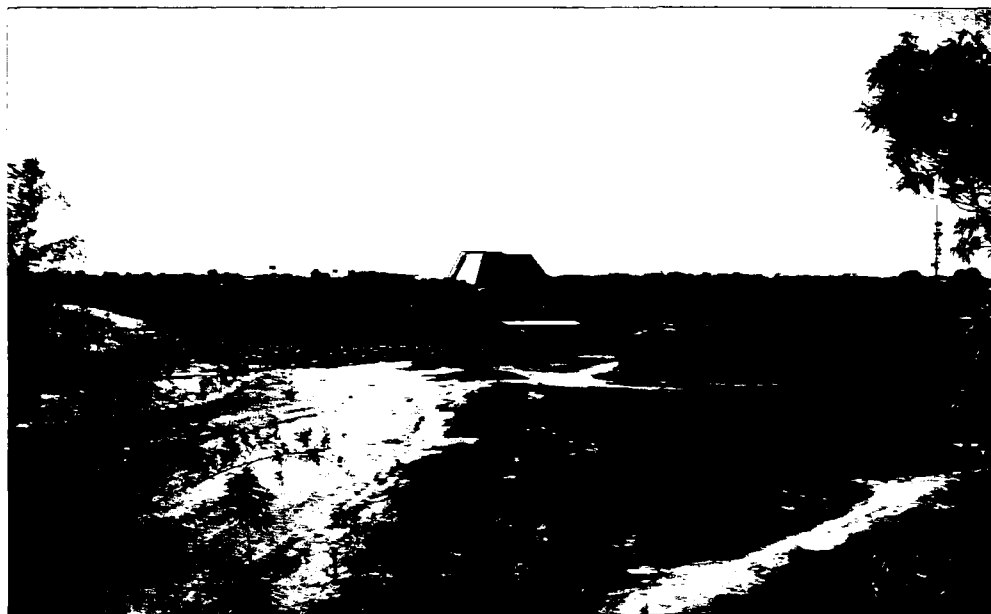


PLATE 60 *Mindil Beach and the casino: an Aboriginal and European cultural landscape*

Aboriginal influence on vegetation before 1869, and the current existence of places around the city such as the Bagot Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal town camps and the site of the former Kahlin Compound at Myilly Point (of which no physical evidence remains). The non-Aboriginal, mainly European, contribution that has been the focus of this book was very deliberately the opposite to what was perceived, even if mistakenly, as the Aboriginal. As in other isolated 'frontier' locations, the non-indigenous inhabitants of Darwin created tangible remains, however modest and humble, in an attempt to legitimise their occupation.

One of Darwin's most prominent buildings, the 1982 casino at Mindil Beach, is on a site of great significance to Aborigines as a burial ground. The Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority was able to prove in 1981 and 1982 that it was used as such until the mid 1930s. 'The fact that this was considered implausible by many public figures', David Ritchie of the Authority later maintained, was a 'reflection of the transient nature of Darwin's population and ethnocentric selectivity of our perception of history.'¹² Protests were made against construction at Mindil Beach but with little real effect. Val McGuiness, a senior Aboriginal member of the Kungarakany Group, commented that, 'If the Europeans had any respect for the dead at all, it didn't matter who they were, they wouldn't have built the Casino where it is, or attempted to build it there – they would have built it somewhere else and left that as a memorial to the Aboriginal people.'¹³

The European zeal in Darwin for building and rebuilding has frequently been oblivious to the sorts of concerns that McGuiness expressed. This zeal marks, in many respects, the continued assertion of a desire to mark the land as belonging to the settlers rather than the earlier indigenous inhabitants of the Darwin area and their descendants. It also reflects an insecurity brought about by a hostile climate and the proximity to Asia. In order to come to terms with, and understand, this often complex process surviving key elements of the highly diverse cultural landscape created in Darwin after 1869 need to be preserved.

¹² Ritchie 1989, 4

¹³ Ritchie 1989, 11

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David Carment is Professor of History at the Northern Territory University. He has published extensively in the areas of Australian political history, North Australian history and cultural heritage studies. Active in historical and conservation organisations, he is a former President of the National Trust in the Northern Territory and the Historical Society of the Northern Territory. He has lived in Darwin since 1981.