

Address by Dr Philip Cole on the occasion of the 130th Anniversary of the opening of St James Cathedral, 27th October, 1892

Two world wars. Innumerable cyclones, two depressions, four recessions, floods, droughts, many repairs and renovations, and even the odd earthquake. But to paraphrase the words of Sir Elton John

“We’re still standing”

Welcome to the 130th anniversary of St James Cathedral

A few very special things about this gorgeous church.

- The pipe organ is the largest in Queensland outside of Brisbane & in itself has a remarkable history dating from 1884 – more of that in a minute
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- The pillars you are sitting alongside weigh six tons each. They were at the time they were built, the largest ever made in Australia, and temporarily removed to be shown at the great exhibition in Melbourne
- Behind me we have the largest circular apse outside of a Capital city in Aus,
- Above me is a spectacular Rood Cross. “Rood” refers to the actual cross Christ was crucified, and they are usually near life size and finally
- The saga of the building this cathedral is remarkable.

Our church is a flagship of the Anglican Church of Australia, which is part of the worldwide Anglican communion. This is a union of self-governing Churches that share the same traditions and same broad values and beliefs. The first Anglican Church was the Church of England, which formally came into existence during Tudor times in the sixteenth century. However, it can trace its roots a 1000 years further back when the Catholic St Augustine landed on the coast of pagan Kent with forty very nervous monks. “Anglican” is old word for “English”.

Anglicanism in Australia is as old as the first fleet, which in 1788 carried with them an Anglican priest. Richard Johnson. Governor Phillips said he had no soldiers or convicts to help him build a church and discouraged him from holding services because it took them away from their work. But Johnson was not discouraged. In between teaching, farming and liaising with the local indigenous population, He built on his own a church that could contain 500 people and within which were heard the first sermons in Australia

Townsville was declared a municipality eight decades later in February 1866. John Melton Black elected as its first Mayor. A year later that in 1867 part of Melton Hill was set aside & a small group of people gathered for services either open aired or under tarps; there were about 200 people living in the port at the time. By 1869, they had sufficient funds to start building a chapel on this spot, which was opened two years later under a temporary roof as they had run out of money. This St James chapel probably stood around what is now the great western entrance. Melton Hill is actually a rocky outcrop of a huge rock that the Bindal people called Cootharinga. It’s a bit like Uhluru. The top

of Castle Hill is the peak of Cootharinga. Three quarters of Cootharinga is underground, but what we can see reaches almost to the CBD and the Strand, and out to West End and Garbutt

Seven years later in 1878 the diocese of North Queensland was created, based at St James' Chapel in Townsville. The new diocese's first bishop [George Henry Stanton](#) was appointed on 24 June of that year. It probably was not a hotly sought-after position: Stanton had no experience as a Bishop and had never been to Australia. He had for ten years been the vicar of St Giles, an inner London parish said by Dickens to be the worse slum in England. So, Stanton was used to tough conditions and Townsville got lucky. Bishop Stanton did not immediately go to Townsville but spent several months in England, trying to develop some of the skills he thought might be necessary in North Queensland. He learned to swim and to ride a horse. He also raised funds and attracted clergy for his new diocese. He finally arrived in Townsville in May 1879, preaching his first service on 21 May 1879

Through perseverance and personal contacts, Bishop Stanton largely overcame the shortage of clergy and funds, and within ten years erected ten new churches. A diocesan magazine, the *Monthly Record*, appeared in 1883 and next year Stanton summoned the first diocesan synod (official meeting) of clergy and lay representatives. He travelled widely on horseback to get to know the conditions and needs of the outback and to encourage its clergy and people. He planned a permanent cathedral at Townsville

Stanton was an energetic fund raiser and in 1883 Sydney Architect Arthur Blackett was commissioned to build a cathedral alongside the chapel. This was actually quite common practice in "the old country" and explains why next to an English cathedral there is usually a slightly older, smaller church.

The original design was ambitious – a neo-Gothic cathedral built in stone, to make it resemble English Cathedrals of the Middle Ages. This was the fashion of the time and the British Houses of Parliament had been built in the same style a little earlier. The design was modified due to cost. Instead of Sandstone, they used red bricks made at a foundry at the Bohle and in June 1887 building began. At a time when the average wage was two pounds a week, the explorer and pastoralist donated 1000. William Aplin also donated a considerable amount. William Hahn's descendants worship in the cathedral to this day

Townsville was a small place. The few trained bricklayers were in great demand to work on the fine buildings we see to this day on the Strand and Flinders Street. There would have been three grades of workers at the Cathedral – untrained laborers, some volunteers, who could work under supervision, people with some experience who could work unsupervised, and journeymen. These were men who had completed a qualification, who as well as working unsupervised could direct the work of those who could not. They were called journeymen because they journeyed from place to place looking for jobs

As mentioned, Castle and Melton Hills are in fact massive underground rocks, similar to Uluru, & by November 1887 excavation work on the solid rock had significantly depleted their funds. Fundraising continued & by mid-1891 the cathedral as we would recognise it rose above ground.

By late 1892 there was half a cathedral, no roof and no money. A temporary roof was constructed along with fencing to keep feral wild goats from entering the church. Half built, this first stage of the cathedral was consecrated on 27 October 1892 by the second Bishop of North Queensland, [Christopher Barlow](#), with the idea of finishing it when funds allowed

But they did have a splendid organ. The organ was a gift from a friend of Bishop Stanton's, Miss S.E. Holland. Part of the organ was installed in the St James chapel in 1884 when it arrived from Sheffield, England. In 1892 it was moved into the half-built Cathedral; prior to this services were held in the cathedral with music coming from the adjacent chapel. In 1903 pipes were added and the organ was reconfigured and as moved below where it sits today,

Over the next few years, a more permanent roof was added after cyclone damage, but the cathedral remained unfinished until a new Bishop reignited fund raising in 1953. Over the next two decades the cathedral was finally completed and was consecrated in 1978. This was one hundred and eleven years. after a handful of people dreamed of a cathedral.

Church buildings bear witness to the presence of Christ in a particular place, and they are houses of prayer where the followers of Jesus gather together to worship God and sing His praises. They also bare witness to the Christian tradition. They take us back to those who have gone before, and what has been done before. St James' Cathedral is no exception. It is not only a spiritual home for the Diocese and the Parish, but a held place: where the visions, memories and dreams of many people through the centuries are preserved in art, architecture, woodcarving, music and ceremony. Unlike museums, which are full of lifeless artefacts of the past, our Cathedral is a living, vital place in which the past, present, and future are wonderfully blended into a fitting home for the children of God.