



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES

Permanent Entry

1. **Data Base No** 2285
2. **Name** *St Matthew's Anglican Church* (1917)
3. **Description of elements included in this entry** St Matthew's Anglican Church building and the land on which it stands being Lot Port Hedland 37 on OP Port Hedland 102, comprised in C/T 1857/907.
4. **Local Government Area** Town of Port Hedland
5. **Location** Edgar Street, Port Hedland
6. **Owner** Port Hedland Tourist Committee Incorporated.
7. **Statement of Significance of Place (Assessment in Detail)**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

St Matthew's Anglican Church is a simple timber church building constructed to replace a church built in 1908 that was destroyed by fire in 1917.

Port Hedland was not gazetted as a town until 1896, and by 1905 the population had only grown to 120 persons.¹ It was part of the Roebourne parish until 1910, when the Rev'd William Patrick was appointed Priest-in-Charge of Port Hedland and Marble Bar. It was during the time of Stipendiary Lay Reader Thomas Jackson that the first church was erected in Port Hedland. It was built in 1908 and dedicated by the by the first Archdeacon of the North West, the Ven. Frederick Richard Books on 16 August 1908. The opening of the church was noted in the *Hedland Advocate*, "Great credit is due to the energetic representative of the Anglican Church in Hedland (Mr. Jackson) on the opening of the new church building which took place on Sunday last, Ven. Archdeacon Brooks officiating. Mr. Jackson has done nearly all the carpentry work."² Work continued on the church through the actions of the congregation.

However, the church was mysteriously burnt down on 2 February 1917, while the Rector was out of town.³ Notes from the Parish Registers provide a few insights into the nature of the isolated church. The Register covers the period from 1917 to 1932

¹ Archdeacon Ted Doncastor, 'Port Hedland Anglican History' (unpublished, 1982) p.1.

² *Hedland Advocate* 22 August 1908, p.2d. The article also provides a detailed description of the internal layout of the church, particular features and colours used.

³ Archdeacon Ted Doncastor, *op. cit.* p.2.

and begins with the following note, "All previous records were destroyed on February Second 1917 on which date the iron Church erected by Rev'd Thomas Jackson, at one time Lay Reader in this District was completely destroyed by fire."⁴

A new church was rebuilt which Bishop Trower dedicated in August 1918, although the first service had been held in it on 28 April 1918.⁵ The Register also shows that until 1966, the Parish of Port Hedland included the whole of the Pilbara. In February 1967, the Parish was divided into two and today the Pilbara now consists of four parishes.

Mention of the proposal to sell the church is made in a newspaper article in April 1986, stating that it was being sold so that the congregation could build a new, larger place of worship in Padbury Place, closer to where people lived.⁶

St Matthew's Anglican Church was purchased in 1989 by the Port Hedland Tourist Bureau Management Committee from the Anglican Diocese. Purchase and restoration has been carried out with the assistance of the community, businesses, a grant from the Department of Arts (\$16,500) in 1989 and a further grant of \$15,800 in December 1992, through the Community Cultural, Recreation and Sporting Facilities Program. *The Olde St Matthew's Church Art Gallery and Exhibition Centre* was officially opened in September 1993, by Graeme Campbell MHR. Since that date it has hosted a number of art exhibitions and other functions, and the building is developing as a focal point for community arts.⁷ The fight to save the church from demolition and to develop a suitable alternative use evoked a strong community response that was well detailed in the press.

The place was classified by the National Trust of Australia (WA) in 1983.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

St Matthew's Anglican Church is a simple timber building with a corrugated iron roof built in 1917 to replace an earlier church built on the site in 1908, which was destroyed by fire earlier in 1917. The Rectory, which had been built in 1916, was damaged beyond repair in the cyclone of 11 January 1939, and a small house and garage were then provided at the rear of the church.

In its approximate sixty year history *St Matthew's Anglican Church* has withstood a number of cyclones; one in 1939; Cyclone Joan in 1975 and Cyclones Karen and Leo in March 1977. It was damaged in Cyclone Joan, losing part of its roof and two of its side doors, but came through undamaged in 'Karen' and 'Leo'. Just prior to Cyclone Joan a decision had been made to paint the interior. Work had already commenced when Cyclone 'Joan' struck. The damage caused meant that renovation work had to be stopped until insurance work had been completed. When it was continued, the roof was re-screwed (thus no damage in 'Karen' and 'Leo'). In addition the interior was painted and a number of aesthetic renovations were carried out.⁸

⁴ notes from the Parish Register, held on file. Gerald S. Stubbs was Rector at the time and R.G. Hawkins and C.A. Clutterbuck were Church Wardens.

⁵ Archdeacon Ted Doncastor, *op. cit.* p.2.

⁶ *News of the North* 24 April 1986, p.2.

⁷ Taken from a supporting statement attached to a Conservation Incentives Program application, submitted by the Port Hedland Tourist Bureau, dated December 1993.

⁸ 'The Church Four Cyclones Could not Destroy' (typed article, no source, held on file).

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

1. AESTHETIC VALUE

2. HISTORIC VALUE

St Matthew's Anglican Church has historic value as a demonstration of the length of settlement in a town in which there are very few old buildings. The extant church building replaced an earlier church on the site, thus demonstrating the continuing use of the site for religious purposes as evidence of settlement.

3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

4. SOCIAL VALUE

St Matthew's Anglican Church is highly valued by the community. This is demonstrated by the decision to find a suitable re-use for the building, after it was no longer needed as a church.

Prior to the change in use, *St Matthew's Anglican Church*, in the early years, provided a focal point in the religious lives of many people in the Pilbara area as there were no other Anglican churches in the region.

The building contributes strongly to the community's sense of history and place as it is one of the few reminders of the early establishment of the town.

5. RARITY

St Matthew's Anglican Church is one of the few surviving buildings dating from the early history of the Port Hedland township.

6. REPRESENTATIVENESS

CONDITION

Following recent restoration work, the building is in sound condition.

INTEGRITY

Although there has been minor modifications, to accommodate the change in use from a church to art gallery and exhibition centre, the current use does not impinge upon the interior space. *St Matthew's Anglican Church* retains its integrity as an example of a simply constructed place of worship.

AUTHENTICITY

Despite minor alterations, the fabric of the building is still basically in its original state and therefore it has a high degree of authenticity.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St Matthew's Anglican Church has cultural heritage significance for the following:

the place has historic significance relating to the continuing use, until 1989, of the site for religious purposes in a region in which churches were great distances apart;

the building and place contribute to the sense of place of Port Hedland in that it is a building from the era of early settlement; and,

the building is one of the few remaining buildings, within the township, that reflect the early settlement of Port Hedland.

8. Register of Heritage Places

Interim Entry 16/10/1992

Permanent Entry 01/03/1994

9. Conservation Order

10. Heritage Agreement

11. References

National Trust Assessment Exposition

Archdeacon Ted Doncastor, 'Port Hedland Anglican History' (unpublished, 1982)