

Architecture Feature

christ church THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN BUNDABERG



The story of the construction of Christ Church in Bundaberg is an interesting tale of promises, delays, illness and death. The Church structure was finally completed in 1927, after more than 40 years of planning and preparation, although the fittings and interior were not completed until the mid 1930's.

In the early settlement years of Bundaberg, around 1870, the Hon. Alfred Brown, owner of the original Gin Gin station, gave four allotments facing Bourbong and Quay Streets, a sum of one acre of land, as a site for a church. In November 1874 the first steps toward building a church were taken, when telegraph officer Mr E. J. Welch called a meeting to discuss the construction; and within five months, tenders were called from local businesses.

The first Anglican church was built in June 1876 - the site faced Quay Street, and cost £380. In October 1878, the first Rector arrived in Bundaberg - the Rev. William Morris, a Deacon. With a church and a Rectory to come to, and a gift from the Bundaberg parishioners of a horse and sulky, the new Rector was able to visit his parishioners, and increase his congregation markedly.

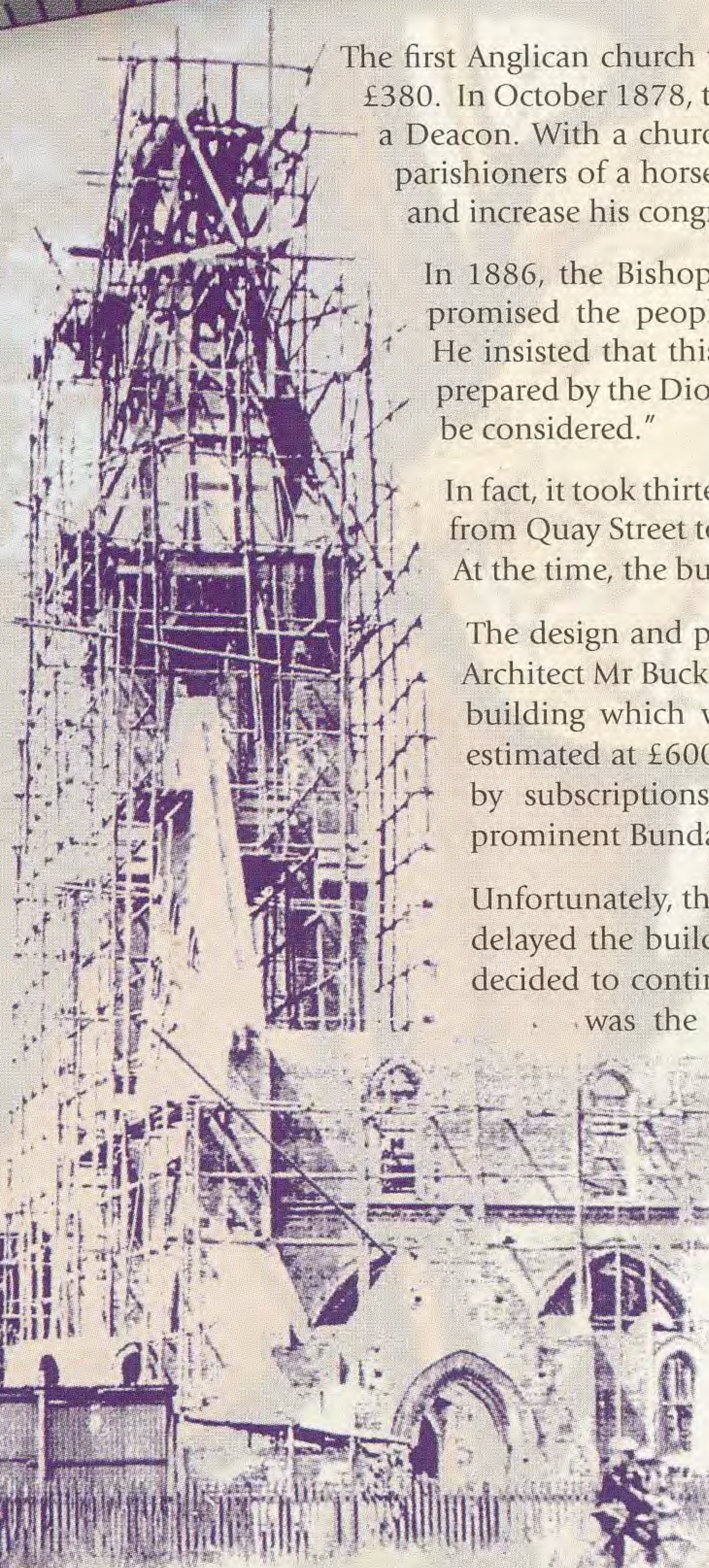
In 1886, the Bishop of Brisbane, Bishop W.T.T. Webber visited Bundaberg, and promised the people of the parish that a permanent church would be built. He insisted that this be done as soon as possible, and that "no plans but those prepared by the Diocesan Architect, Mr J. Hingeston Buckeridge of Sydney, should be considered."

In fact, it took thirteen years before the decision was made to move the old church from Quay Street to a site in Woongarra Street, where Christ Church now stands. At the time, the building fund had a credit of £1401 for the construction.

The design and plans for the new church were indeed drawn by the Diocesan Architect Mr Buckeridge. The plans showed a simple, but spacious and beautiful building which would accommodate up to 600 worshippers. The cost was estimated at £6000. Extra funds for the construction of the church were raised by subscriptions, appeals, bazaars and individual donations from many prominent Bundaberg residents.

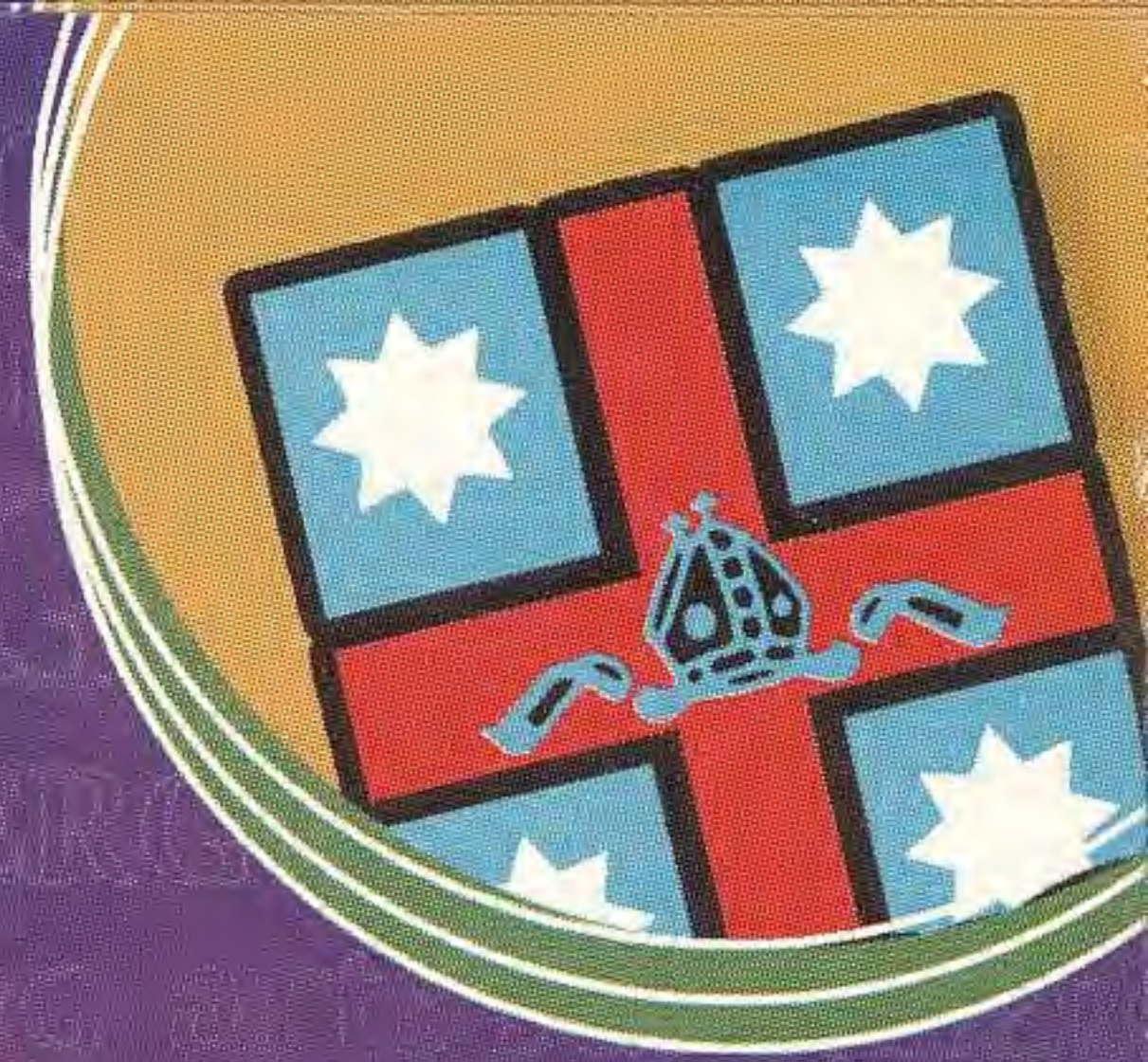
Unfortunately, the death of the Rev. Morris, followed by that of Bishop Webber, delayed the building of the new church until after World War I, when it was decided to continue with the plan for a permanent church. Mr F.H. Faircloth was the appointed architect, and the original plans drawn by Mr Buckeridge were adapted to allow for the use of bricks and concrete as the primary building materials. The foundation stone for the new Church was finally laid on August 8, 1920 by Bishop Le Fanu.

Work did not progress smoothly however, as both the sixth and seventh Rectors of Bundaberg found the process of overseeing construction too much for their health. It was not until 1922, under the direction of the eighth Rector, Rev. B.P. Walker, that steady progress was made on the building of the church. The structure was built using day labour, which allowed for a flexible schedule. As funds were



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raised, so building started again. Rope pulleys and blocks and tackles were the main mechanisms for building the structure.

The church itself was built in the English Gothic style, with characteristic features such as pointed arches with mouldings in porches, windows and arcades. The open roof was constructed in Oregon Pine, and was the only section of the church built by contract labour. The sanctuary runs the full width of the nave and chancel, and lends dignity to the building. The interior consists of nave, north and south aisles with arcades of arches, a semi-circular baptistry, lofty tower and vestries for choir and clergy. The pipe organ is housed in an organ chamber built over the north side of the church. The organ, an American Moller Pipe Organ, is one of only three in Australia, and is unique in that it is mechanical rather than pneumatic.

Christ Church was officially opened on Sunday February 20, 1927 by the Archbishop of Brisbane, The Most Rev. G. Sharp. In 1928, The Rev. A.H. Osborn became the new Rector of Christ Church. It was during his incumbency that much of the interior of Christ Church was designed and installed, and many of the interesting features of the church were as a result of Rev. Osborn's trips to England and Europe.

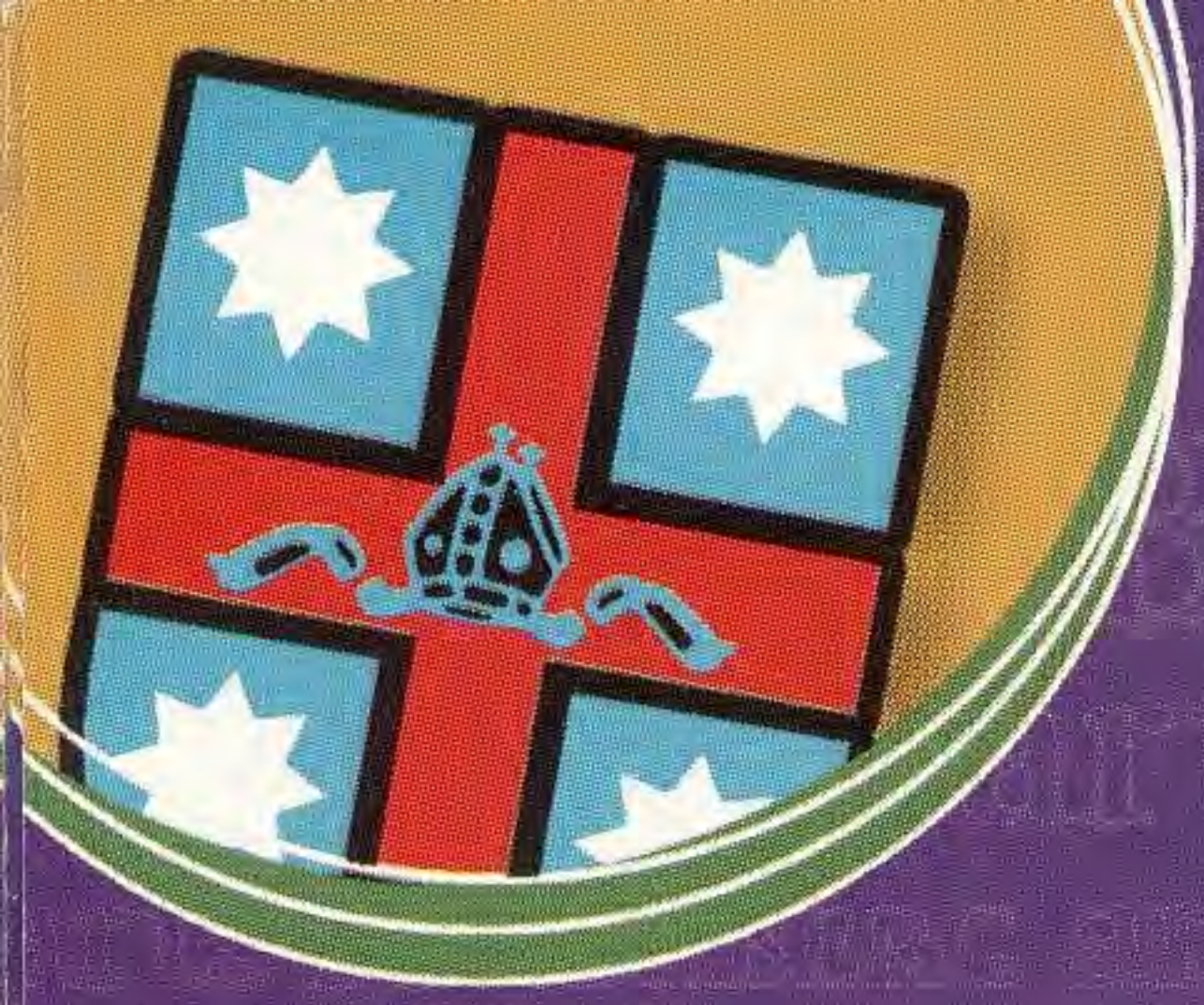
The Lychgate and Wayside Cross were erected after 1930, and the creeper covering these structures was grown from a cutting brought back from Glastonbury Abbey. On one of his trips visiting cathedrals and churches in England, Rev. Osborn collected five stones from churchyards and rockeries that held a special significance to him. The western end of Christ Church has built into its fabric pieces of Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Glastonbury Abbey, Old Sarum in Salisbury and Chester Cathedral. There is also a piece from the catacombs in Rome at the rear of the reredos.

On this same trip overseas, Rev. Osborn collected the remains of several stained glass windows and brought them back for Christ Church. Fearing that he would be asked to pay a large duty on them if declared as Stained Glass Windows, the enterprising Rector described them as 'broken glass', thus avoiding any excessive import fees.

Many of the features of Christ Church have been donated by pioneer families in Bundaberg. The fine wooden reredos in the sanctuary was donated by the Buss family, who were also responsible for the cost of building the church tower, and the gift of the pulpit. The altar was given by the Curtis family, as was the silver altar cross.

One of the more spectacular features of Christ Church is a magnificent brass lectern with the figure of an eagle attached, which was donated by Miss Tanner in memory of her brother the Rev. E. Tanner, who was the first ordained Anglican priest in Bundaberg. The lectern was made in England, and shipped to Bundaberg, and is acknowledged as one of the finest lecterns in Australia.





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In 1977, a set of Tubular Bells was installed in the Tower. These bells were originally installed and rung at the Roman Catholic Order at St Mary's Mount in 1892, making them the first peal of bells to be erected over a monastery in the southern hemisphere.

According to Mr Tony Osborn, son of the Rev. A.H. Osborn, Christ Church was responsible for many firsts in the Bundaberg area – not necessarily all church-related:

- For the dedication of the building in February 1927, the hottest time of the year, large trays with slabs of ice were fixed on supports under the ceiling fans to move cool air through the church. This may make the church the first air conditioned building in Bundaberg – at least until the ice melted.
- The church held the first night sports venue in Bundaberg, with two tennis courts set up in Buss Park on Church land. The courts were flood lit at night for social tennis games.

The structure and interior of Christ Church is a memorial to many familiar Bundaberg names, with the generosity of that early congregation, and perseverance and dedication of early Rectors, reflected in the gracious and awe-inspiring church.

Many thanks to Mr Tony Osborn for sharing his knowledge of the history of Christ Church, and to the Christ Church Parish Office for additional photographs.

SUE GAMMON
Bundaberg Library

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