



Editor - Peter Ludlow

History of Peel Island's Catholic Church

The Catholic Church was situated at the back of the men's compound and had once been a hut for several female Aboriginal patients. After the Aboriginal patients were relocated from Peel to Fantome Island, off Townsville, the hut was shifted to its new position using a sled affair. For a time it was used as a common room for the men before it was converted to a Catholic Church. ⁽¹⁾

After the Lazaret was closed in 1959, the Church, like many of the other remaining buildings, gradually decayed due to neglect, weather and termites.

When the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service ("QPWS") took control of Peel Island in 1993, they refurbished quite a few of the former Lazaret's huts. The Roman Catholic Church was one of these huts. The hut was re-stumped and the roof replaced to make the hut water proof. ⁽²⁾

In 1998, The Friends of Peel Island Association Inc ("FOPIA") was formed to help raise public awareness of the history of Peel Island and to help with the restoration of Peel's Lazaret buildings. In particular, FOPIA member, Brian Isaac (now deceased), had long been advocating the restoration of the hut formerly used as a Church by the Roman Catholic patients.

Another FOPIA member, Gordon Wilson, took up Brian's cause and contacted the local Catholic Parish of Cleveland to see if they'd be interested in the project.

The congregation at Cleveland's Star of the Sea Church took up the challenge and raised the necessary finances to supply the building materials to restore the internal condition of the hut.

Congregation members, John Hickey (master builder), Patrick Hickey (assistant) and Anthony Ryan (labourer) gave their time and professional expertise to restore the Church.

The painting was carried out, both internally and externally, by Bob Anderson (master painter and decorator) and Tony Moore and Anthony Castelli (assistant painters). ⁽³⁾

Catholic Church following Restoration

(Photo courtesy of Scott Fowle)



The Altar was falling off the wall and was in need of urgent repairs.
It was removed by the QPWS Ranger Mark Callanan who repaired and reinstalled the Altar. ⁽²⁾



The Altar repaired and waiting to be reinstalled in the Church by Ranger Mark Callanan

(Photo courtesy of Scott Fowle)

The Altar reinstalled in the Church

(Photo courtesy of Scott Fowle)



The project was completed in August 2011.

The Church was rededicated as Saint Damien's.

It was named after Father Damien who spent so much of his life looking after those afflicted with Hansen's Disease at Molokai in the Hawaiian Islands in the early 20th Century. In 2009, Father Damien had been proclaimed a Saint by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Rededication Service, which was celebrated by Bishop Joseph Oudeman on Peel Island on Tuesday, 2 August, 2011, was the culmination of a lot of hard work.

The Church is available to all denominations and provides a unique modern-day link between the Peel Island Lazaret and the Mainland community. ⁽³⁾

References

- (1) "Alex" (pseudonym), a former patient at Peel's Lazaret
- (2) Scott Fowle
- (3) "FOPIA Flyer" August 2011