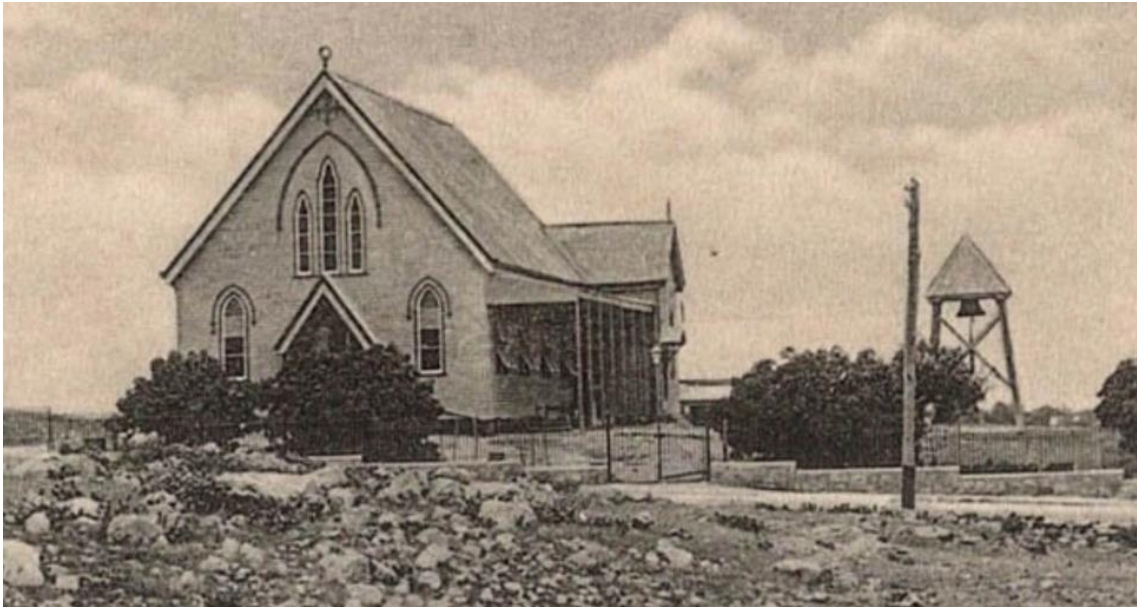


St Paul's, Charters Towers, QLD



This month's story is about St Paul's Church in Charters Towers, North Queensland. Charters Towers lies inland 136 km south-west of Townsville and has a vibrant history dating from its booming gold rush era in the late 19th century. Anglican worship began in Charters Towers during its golden heyday and has continued to flourish as the town has evolved over time. Above is a photo of St Paul's around 1883.

The Gudjal traditional owners lived in the region for thousands of years. Pastoral settlement began in 1861. Gold was first found in 1871, famously by a 12-year-old Aboriginal boy named Jupiter Mosman when he was searching for horses that had strayed from a prospectors' camp. Jupiter is commemorated in the town by a striking boomerang-shaped monument. His discovery brought a spectacular influx of fortune-seekers to what proved to be Australia's richest major goldfield, as well as intensive investment in mining infrastructure. This photo, taken around 1920, shows Jupiter Mossman (left) standing on the spot where he found the first gold nugget at Charters Towers.





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Charters Towers fast became Queensland's most populous urban centre after Brisbane, with all the trappings of massive prosperity. It had its own Stock Exchange and around 60 hotels. Local records, such as those of the Northern Miner newspaper, founded in 1872 and still published today, acclaim the town's fine shops and residences, theatres and civilised lifestyle. Indeed, around the turn of the century, Charters Towers was affectionately known as "The World" for offering every amenity and pleasure that life could furnish. The above photo is of Gill St taken around the time of Federation.



The first Anglican service in the area was held in 1873. After that several local churches were built, including the original St Paul's in 1876. This was outgrown by its congregation and was replaced in 1883. A competition to design the second church was won by architect William George Smith. St Paul's moved yet again in 1965, it is said for reasons of access and maintenance.

But William Smith's attractive building is still much in evidence: it is now a theatre, known as St Paul's Playhouse, (depicted above) the town's oldest wooden building still in use.



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Although commercial mining in the town had proved uneconomic by 1917 – by which time some 200 tonnes of gold had been extracted – the largest single nugget, weighing 143 ounces, was found by Mr Tom Ah Hoy in 1920. The nugget was bought by the local hospital to serve as first prize in an Art Union lottery. Some mining has resumed in recent years. Above is a view of the Day Dawn Consolidated Mine in Charters Towers, Queensland, Australia, around 1890. The image shows the mine's infrastructure, including buildings, machinery, and the surrounding landscape.



The present-day St Paul's looks a delightful place of worship. Its airy modern architecture is complemented by a lovely native garden well suited to Charters Towers' tropical, semi-arid climate.



Two structures in the garden immediately catch the eye: a bell tower (depicted here) with an English-cast bell which was relocated from the earlier church site. The other facing the street, is a tall, stunning crucifix reaching out in welcome.

The original boom was long and profitable enough that its buildings and streetscape retain the fine character of those exciting years. Below is the now heritage listed Stock Exchange Arcade. These years also saw the building of a number of churches and establishment of numerous schools, including two Anglican boarding schools providing especially for children from remote cattle stations and communities across Australia's 'Top End'. These two schools have now combined as the co-educational All Souls St Gabriels School, which has strong ties with St Paul's Church. Its students are much engaged in parish activities such as lively musical events. St Paul's runs a Thrift Shop which is said to be much appreciated for the quality and value of its goods, while visitors to the church comment very favourably on the services they attend and the warm welcome they receive.





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A new public art work was completed early last year and has become a celebratory feature in the town. A large handmade mural, 80 metres long and 7 foot high (using over 5 million mosaic tiles) depicts a montage of life during the gold rush in Charters Towers. It is based on artwork by Queensland artist Trisha Lambi. Above is depicted only one portion of mural.