

Occasional Papers No. 27

**REBUILDING THE BEACON:
POINT SMITH, PORT ESSINGTON**

by

Father Frank Flynn

State Library of the Northern Territory

Darwin 1992

Cataloguing-in-publication data provided by the State Library of the Northern Territory.

FLYNN, Frank.

Rebuilding the beacon: Point Smith, Port Essington / by Frank Flynn. Darwin : State Library of the Northern Territory, 1992.

Occasional papers : no. 27

ISBN 0 7245 0661 6

ISSN 0817-2927

1. Confalonieri, Don Angelo.
 2. Victoria (N.T.).
 3. Historic sites - Northern Territory - Victoria.
 4. Beacons - Northern Territory - Port Essington.
-
- i. Title.
 - ii. Series (Occasional papers (State Library of the Northern Territory) ; no. 27).
 - iii. State Library of the Northern Territory.

623.8944

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. John Stokes and the Men of the Beagle – Discoverers of Port Darwin, by Alan Powell. (1986)
2. The History of the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory, by Bishop John Patrick O'Loughlin. (1986)
3. Chinese Contribution to Early Darwin, by Charles See-Kee. (1987)
4. Point Charles Lighthouse ; and, The Military Occupation of Cox Peninsula, by Mike Foley. (1987)
5. Operation Navy Help: Disaster Operations by the Royal Australian Navy, Post-Cyclone Tracy, by Commodore Eric Johnston. (1987)
6. Xavier Herbert : a Bibliography, compiled by David Sansome. (1988)
7. The Founding of Maningrida, by Jack Doolan. (1989)
8. Writing a History of Australia, by C M H Clark. (1989)
9. Katherine's Earlier Days, by Pearl Ogden. (1989)
10. Aboriginal Pharmacopoeia, by Ella Stack. (1989)
11. The Pioneers of the Old Track, by Graeme Bucknall. (1990)
12. Arnhem Land : a Personal History, by Ted Evans. (1990)
13. Elsie Bohning, the Little Bush Maid, compiled by Barbara James. (1990)
14. The Erratic Communication between Australia and China, by Eric Rolls. (1990)
15. (Withdrawn).
16. Planning a Program for Aborigines in the 1950's, by Harry Giese. (1990)
17. Three Wigs and Five Hats, by Sir Edward Woodward. (1990)
18. They of the Never Never, by Peter Forrest. (1990)
19. Memories of Pre-War Northern Territory Towns, by Alec Fong Lim. (1990)
20. The Darwin Institute of Technology : a Historical Perspective, by Nan Giese. (1990)
21. Ten Years of Self Government : a Constitutional Perspective, by Graham Nicholson. (1990)
22. The Northern Territory – South Australian "White Elephant" / Commonwealth Prize : Perception and Reality in the Federation Era, by Cynthia M Atherton. (1991)

23. Growing up in the Pastoral Frontier : Conception, Birth and Childhood on Cattle Stations in the Northern Territory, 1920–1950; and, Recreation and Entertainment on Northern Territory Pastoral Stations, 1910–1950, by Lyn Riddett. (1991)
24. Aborigines and Development in Northern Australia, by H. C. Coombs. (1991)
25. The End of the Bad Old Days : European Settlement in Central Australia, 1871–1894, by R G Kimber. (1991)
26. Some Community Problems from a Court's Perspective, by Dennis Barritt. (1991)
27. Rebuilding the Beacon : Point Smith, Port Essington, by Frank Flynn. (1992)

INTRODUCTION

Father Frank Flynn, MSC, does all things well. Author ('The Living Heart', 'Northern Gateway', etc.), ophthalmic surgeon, Catholic priest and missionary, honoured by Church (Cross pro Ecclesia et Pontifice), by State (Officer of the Order of Australia), and by his peers (honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Sydney, and a named fellowship "The Frank Flynn Fellowship" established by the Menzies School of Health Research).

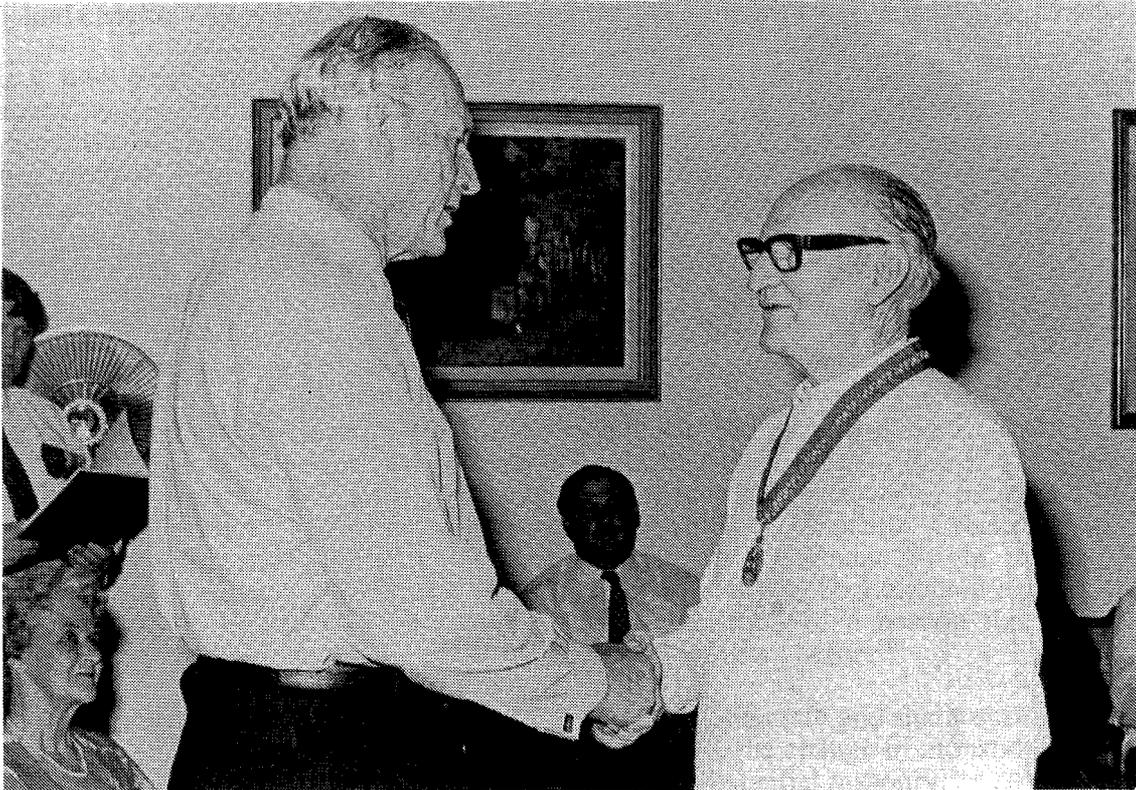
In this classic little vignette we see the forgotten 19th century settlement of Port Essington (or Victoria), and catch glimpses of that hardy Catholic priest seemingly dogged by misfortune, Father Don Angelo Confalonieri. The first priest at Port Essington (in fact, the first Catholic priest in what was later to become the Northern Territory), he was initially ship-wrecked in the Torres Strait on his way to Port Essington, and finally arrived at the settlement bereft of all possessions. After some three years selfless service to the Aborigines of the area, Father Confalonieri died of fever.

Though this visit was made only 14 years ago, the Port Essington and Cobourg Peninsula so vividly described by Father Flynn has already passed into history. It is no longer the sleepy, forgotten place, with only a Ranger Station, and sometimes a visiting prawn trawler or naval patrol boat.

Today Gurig National Park is the focus of tours (albeit still either by boat or plane) which see many visitors tramping over the old Victoria site. First class hotel accommodation is provided by Seven Spirits Bay Resort. The harbour sees many tourist boats and private yachts, in addition to the regular fishing and prawning luggers.

So we are happy to be able to preserve in print a small record of the old (i.e. pre 1980s) Port Essington, with its crumbling remains, the pervading spirit of Father Confalonieri, and, of course, the beacon standing tall on Point Smith at the entrance to the harbour.

We are particularly proud to produce this little item in the golden anniversary year of Father Flynn's consecration as a priest.



Father Flynn being invested as an Officer of the Order of Australia by the Administrator, Mr John England, in 1979.

REBUILDING THE BEACON : POINT SMITH, PORT ESSINGTON

by

Father Frank Flynn

Recently in December 1978, I made a pleasant voyage aboard H.M.A.S. Ardent, at the invitation of the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Bryan Nye. Bryan is the Commander of the Third Patrol Boat Squadron comprising four ships, the "Ardent", the "Aware", the "Adroit" and the "Assail", all members of the 'Attack Class', all 32.5m long with a tonnage of 105, and capable of a speed of 30 knots, though the usual cruising speed is around 17 knots.

This is how it all came about. The Naval charts in current use for navigation in the waters around Cobourg Peninsula were drawn up by Mr Charles Tyers on H.M.S. Alligator in 1839. No more recent charts are available. At the entrance of Port Essington Harbour, Point Smith forms the East Head and Vashon Head stands to the west. A few kilometres further in is a kind of second, narrower entrance with Black Rock Point on the east side and Walford Point on the west. The 1839 chart makes no reference to a 'Beacon' on any of these headlands.

However, two despatches from Captain McArthur, the Commandant of the Marines at Port Essington, to the Admiralty in London, contain a fairly detailed description of a beacon on Point Smith, a beacon over 6m in height, built during the years 1843 to 1845.

Both despatches were written in 1845, the first on September 20th, directed to Colonel J. Owen, C.B., Deputy Adjutant General, arrived at the Royal Marine Office in London on 6 May the following year i.e. seven months later. It stated that, "because of the poor state of the general health of some of the convalescents they were sent to nearby Crocker Island for the benefit of a change of air. In a few days one of them, Lieutenant Wright, returned and said that the men wanted employment as they could now work. So I directed eight of them to be removed to Point Smith to proceed with the erection of a beacon that had been commenced by the ship's company of the "Camelion" two years before."

His report continues: "The experiment of using coral conglomerate and shells succeeded well in providing lime for the plaster and mortar. I hope before the change of monsoon to see the beacon completed to a height of over 25 feet (7.5m), in substantial masonry."

He concluded with comments on the state of health of his men and also the difficulties he was having with the livestock because Private Header, his herdsman, had severe inflammation of the eyes and was confined to hospital.

His second letter of 1 December 1845 was directed to the Honourable E. D. Thomson, M.C., Colonial Secretary, Sydney, who forwarded it to London where it was received on 25 March 1846. He mentioned that he was writing this despatch in readiness, as he expected the vessel "Heroine" to arrive back before the end of the month. After reporting on the condition and morale of his men, he goes on to refer to the beacon: "The party at Point Smith recovered their vigour while finishing the beacon. Provided the basement is what it was represented to be, the beacon will last many years with but a little attention to the joints etc."

It would seem that the basement section to which he refers was that part of the beacon built by the ship's company of the "Camelion"; and he hoped that it would be as strong as it was represented to him to be.

McArthur also mentioned in his second despatch that "it (the beacon) is readily discerned at distances sufficient to prevent vessels running into danger. I have removed the timber beacon which was erected temporarily at a height of 52 feet (15.85m) with its face so directed as to assist vessels approaching from the west".

The despatch goes on: "For the man who cannot find his way into port safely, coming from the westward, something is required to direct him. As the Orontes Shoal lies directly in the parallel of distance which a vessel would take to determine such a low point with its extending reefs as the West Head (Point Smith) has. If the Master be over-cautious about nearing the land he might steer over the Orontes Shoal in bearing up or sounding to, in consequence of not distinguishing the exact position of Point Smith which does, from the appearance of the land, seem to be further out than it actually is. The beacon will correct such errors, and the western approach will now be as well-defined as its opposite."

Little wonder that Bryan Nye's interest was aroused when he read in these despatches from Captain McArthur such details of the construction of the beacon and its importance to the safety of vessels approaching from the westward. It is clear the beacon could not appear on the charts currently in use, since they pre-dated the building of the beacon, and had not been updated since. More than that, no further reference to the existence of the beacon appears in McArthur's later despatches. Also the logs of ships visiting the settlement are equally silent. Moreover, there does not appear to be any evidence to indicate that a beacon has been seen by anyone for the past 30 or 40 years.

Certainly when I last visited the port in 1959 with Bishop O'Loughlin and Captain Spurgeon, who had recently retired as Naval Officer in Charge of the Darwin Area, we took great interest in Black Rock Point (which is only about 3.25 kilometres from Smith Point) because Black Rock was the site of Father Angelo Confalonieri's residence about which we were especially concerned.

Both on land and sea we were quite close to Point Smith and our attention would surely have been drawn to anything resembling a navigational aid in this position. On close examination, some of the photographs we took reveal a rather insignificant mound of earth or sort of midden resembling a large upturned saucer at this spot. Not being aware then of the previous existence of a beacon we had no reason to investigate more thoroughly, though we had ample opportunity to do so as we spent some days anchored off Black Rock Point nearby. The questions arise: What happened to the beacon? When did it happen? Did a cyclone demolish it?

Determined to shed some light on the question, Bryan Nye anchored his ship off Point Smith while he and his ship's company landed to investigate the possible ruins of a beacon. To his amazement, he found, projecting from the insignificant mound of rubble, a considerable number of well-hewn stones. After some excavation work quite a few more stones were revealed. He decided there and then that these were indeed the ruins of the long-lost beacon and that he would try to reconstruct it to serve its original purpose if at all possible.

Two reasons principally influenced him in reaching this decision. Firstly, the conviction that the restoration of a monumental structure of such ancient date would be of national interest and certain to claim the responsive support of the National Trust. This was more particularly the case as so little is being done to preserve the ruins of Victoria itself, the site of the main settlement within the inner harbour. Several graves there, as we were able to verify later, are leaning seriously and are likely to crash in the near future.

A further reason for its reconstruction was to provide a valuable navigational guide for small ships as they enter and leave the harbour, which was indeed the primary purpose of the beacon in the first instance. As a matter of fact, in recent times the sea traffic in this area has become quite considerable, consisting for the most part of prawn trawlers and pearling luggers. We counted more than 20 lights on the horizon some evenings while we lay at anchor.

Without delay, Bryan Nye obtained the necessary permission from the National Trust, the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission, the Naval Authorities, and the Northern Territory Minister of Consumer Affairs. He then set about re-planning the program of the four ships of his squadron to allow seven or eight full working days in which to tackle the challenging task.

I joined the ship when it set out in December 1978 to attempt this project. Leaving the Darwin Wharf at 8.00pm, we dropped anchor at 5.30am the following morning a kilometre or so off shore at Point Smith. Breakfast was at 6.00am, and by 7.00am the ship's dinghy was on its way with the first batch of seven sailors (the ship's company being 18 in all). A daily routine developed so that regularly we rose at 6.00am, breakfasted, and then, in parties of less than 8, were ferried from our anchorage to the beach below where the beacon was to be re-constructed on the Point.

Hard work in the hot sun was interrupted at 11 o'clock each morning and we returned to the ship for lunch. The cook, Bob, who was usually a member of the working party, kept in touch by 'walkie-talkie' with the two crew members on watch aboard ship. His very precise instructions ensured that, without any waste of time, a delicious meal would be ready and waiting as soon as we rejoined ship. After allowing time to relax and treat cuts and abrasions impregnated with lime on hands and arms, the signal would sound at 2.00pm and the dinghy would begin ferrying the first batch of men back to the job. This routine continued till the last stone was fixed in position.

With me on board were two other visitors. Cedric Patterson, long-time resident of Darwin with whom I have always had a close friendship, strengthened by our mutual fascination for the history of the early British settlements on our Northern shores. He is a senior architect with the Department of Construction, and also an active member of the Historical Society and the National Trust. Cedric had advised on the equipment and materials necessary to facilitate the job and he was also there to lend a hand in the supervision of the more technical details in the actual construction. At his suggestion we brought a small cement mixer firmly tied down on deck. It was certainly most welcome in speeding up the job and lightening the work load.

Bob Dunstan, the other visitor, a legal officer with the Crown Law Department, had been engaged in prosecutions of the Taiwanese and other fishing vessels that encroached within the limits of the D.F.Z. (Declared Fishing Zones). He wished to familiarise himself with the ship's routine and operational methods, as he deemed such experience would be helpful in presenting his case for the Crown Prosecution before the Supreme Court.

The working party had commenced immediately to clear away the rubble and, after several hours work, had exposed all that remained of the base of the central conical core of stone, the diameter of which was about 2.75m. This was constructed on very similar lines and of much the same dimensions as the Cornish conical chimneys in the five married quarters that we were to inspect again later in the week at Victoria.

To support and strengthen the central core of the beacon an outer circular wall with a diameter of about 6m had been constructed which probably rose to a height of 1.8m to 2.4m. As only very small sections of this wall were left standing, it was difficult to gain an exact idea of what the original masonry actually looked like. However, a careful examination of the size and shape of the hewn stones shed considerable light on this point. Moreover, the fact that almost the entire circumference of the foundations was eventually exposed compensated quite a bit for the large gaps in the wall fabrics, as from this we knew precisely the base upon which the masonry rose.

After clearing the debris from all that remained of the wall structure and its foundations, the process of re-construction was commenced in earnest. This entailed a painstaking selection of stones from those now scattered over a wide area so as to recapture the correct sequence necessary to restore the original pattern as we now envisaged it to be.

During this sorting out of stones we came across one with the lettering ITH cut into it. Many and varied were the conjectures as to what these letters might signify. Several days later, however, another stone came to light with the lettering SM cut into it. That seemed to solve the mystery - the two stones set side by side indicated SMITH. So SMITH of Point Smith we assumed the letters to mean. These two lettered stones are now in the Darwin Museum.

When the cone rose to its highest point the narrowing circle was scarcely 0.3m in diameter, giving the man at the top little space to manoeuvre or to manipulate the stones. The apex, finally sealed with a cone of concrete, reached a height of about 7.5m. As a last strengthening device, a step or shelf of re-inforced concrete was poured around the base of the outer circle. In this was imbedded a commemorative plaque, which read:

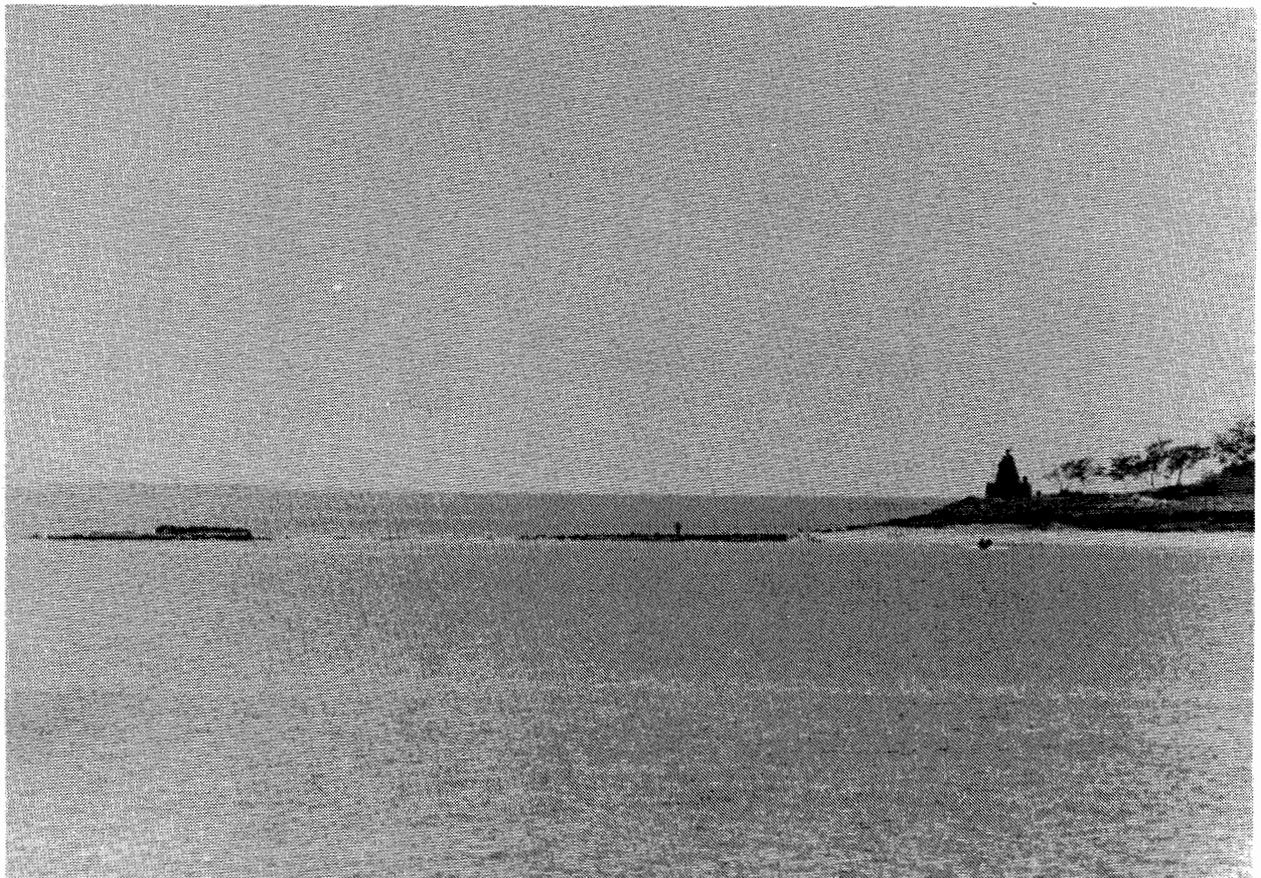
This Beacon
was originally constructed
in December 1845
by Royal Marines from the Victoria Settlement

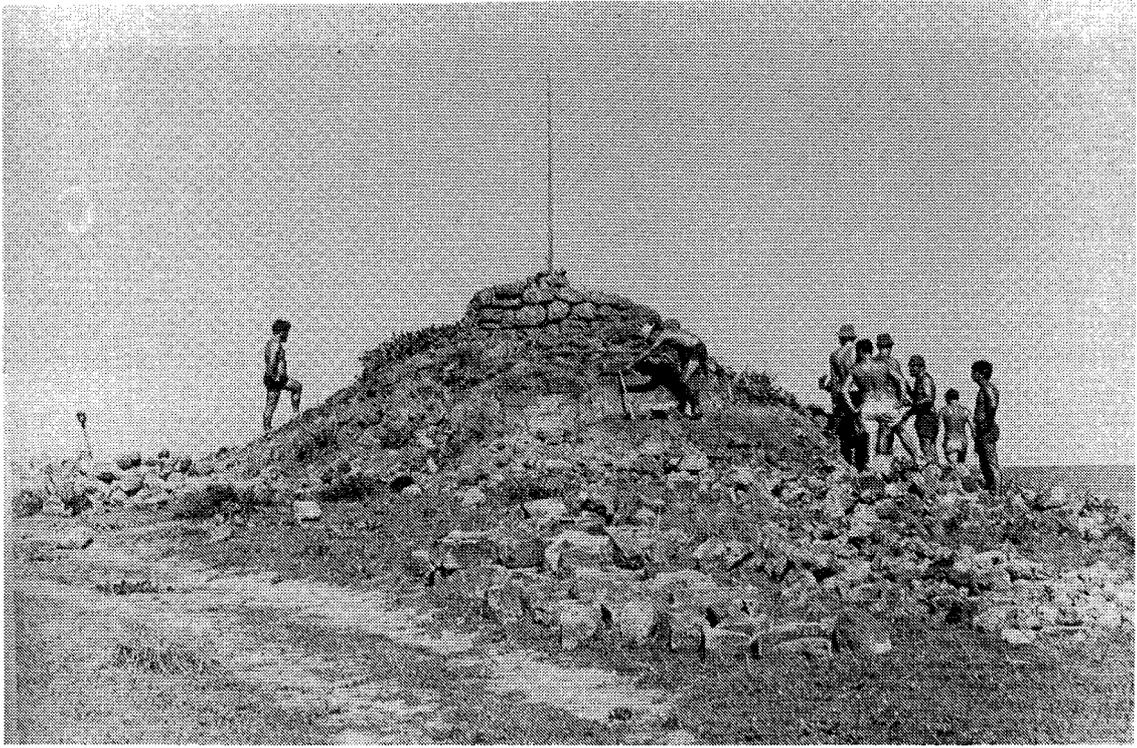
It was built to aid vessels
navigating around the Off-lying reefs
as they approached
- Port Essington -

It was re-constructed by the crew
of
H.M.A.S. ARDENT
on the
20th December 1978



Smith Point before the reconstruction (above) and (below) after. Note the small mound at the end of the Point in the first picture.





During work on the reconstruction.





The site of the beacon (above).

The completed beacon (below).



In the evenings, at dusk, I offered Mass on the fo'c's'le of the ship beside the Bofors gun in the presence of most of the ship's company. These were truly pleasing associations, as we lay at anchor in waters well known to Father Angelo Confalonieri, the first Priest to reside in these northern regions. Across these waters he would gaze from his vantage point on Black Rock nearby, looking out through the heads to the open sea.

It was appropriate too, that Mass was offered on board a Naval ship midst 18 Australian sailors who were engaged in restoring a valuable shipping safety guide that had been originally erected by their British naval counterparts, who were also responsible for establishing the British settlement of Victoria. Father Angelo served as Chaplain to Victoria and he arrived just a few months after the beacon was completed 133 years ago.

The circumstances of his arrival were by no means pleasant as his voyage from Sydney was truly a disastrous one. Along with two Irish catechists Nicholas Hogan and James Fagen, he sailed from Sydney Harbour in the "Heroine", the vessel whose arrival Captain McArthur was expecting when writing his despatch dealing with the completion of the beacon in December 1845. The first part of the voyage was uneventful. Not so the remainder. Through the treacherous Torres Straits the skipper, Captain McKenzie, usually took a short cut. On this voyage, which he intended to be his last, showing greater caution than usual, he followed the more conventional route passing through Endeavour Strait. Ironically this caution proved to be his downfall. Without any warning the "Heroine" struck a reef and sank within minutes.

Of the wreck Father Confalonieri wrote: "I had just been speaking with my dear companions James Fagen and Nicholas Hogan, when we struck on a reef. At daybreak, I found the Captain (McKenzie) clinging to some part of the wreck, I think it was the mast which I too providentially lay hold of. The Captain helped me as much as he could for I was both wounded and exhausted. We managed to get to some rocks and next day we were picked up by a passing barque, "The Enchantress" with Captain Yule in command. He brought us forthwith to Port Essington where the Commandant, Captain McArthur, and members of the garrison showed us every care in their power".

The Missionary, clothed only in a few tattered rags, without any of his possessions, received a most kind and hospitable welcome from Captain McArthur, the Commandant of the settlement, who tried to make good as best he could the loss of clothing, books and vestments and all the many requirements for an active missionary's work.

The injured Priest was admitted to the garrison hospital, and was cared for by the garrison's medical officer, who himself was planning a visit of convalescence to the Ki Islands on the H.M.S. Bramble. Father Confalonieri joined him on this "holiday". Going ashore at Ki the passengers and crew were soon involved in a bartering spree and eventually Father Angelo joined in the act and provided himself with a sampan that would enable him, he thought, to move around the harbour and other waters, on his return. However, the sampan did not remain in his possession for long, as two members of the crew took a fancy to it, and sailed off from the island after deserting the ship, in Father Angelo's newly purchased sampan!

Back at Port Essington Captain McArthur had Father Angelo's interests very much at heart. He had heard of his plans to visit the Alligator River area and possibly to establish his base there. Fearing for his safety, Captain McArthur selected a site on top of Red Cliffs to the side of Black Rock and detailed a detachment of his Marines to erect a hut of reasonable comfort for the missionary. This was about 29km from the main Victoria settlement on the opposite (i.e. eastern) side of the harbour. Happily for Father Angelo, on his return a home awaited him.

For the past 12 years the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission has taken an interest in Cobourg Peninsula. This included the appointment of a resident Ranger to be stationed on the Reserve. The site selected for the Ranger's cottage, office and workshop is alongside the ruins of Father Angelo's home.

The present Ranger is Bryan Walsh from Ballarat, where he attended St. Patrick's College. I met him several times while we were working at the beacon site, which he visited often and made quite a contribution to the effort. Of special value was his loan of a small front-end loader which, while speeding up the lifting of stones and filling, relieved the ship's crew of much heavy manual handling. Gerda, his Dutch-born wife, also from Ballarat and an ex-student of Mary's Mount, did her bit too by bringing from the Ranger's workshop in her four wheel drive vehicle various tools and spare parts when they were most needed.

I had many a yarn with Bryan and Gerda on the beacon site and in their home, ranging over a wide variety of topics. They invited me to offer Mass in their home, and I gladly agreed to do this on the evening before we sailed.

Bryan Nye had arranged for Lieutenant Chris Whitem, Skipper of H.M.A.S. "Aware", to rendezvous with us at Point Smith two days before we were scheduled to leave Port Essington. The "Aware" had spent the previous week patrolling waters to the east of us, in the region of Gove Peninsula. The evening prior to joining us her crew were ashore at Nhulunbuy enjoying the amenities of that modern mining town, set up by Nabalco for their employees engaged in the mining, processing and loading of the bauxite ore which occurs there in abundant supply.

The "Aware" cast anchor, as arranged, to starboard at 9.00am. Cedric, Bob and I immediately transhipped and were on our way to visit the ruins of the once flourishing settlement at Victoria.

Bryan had planned all this so that his crew could carry on without any interruption to the final stages of the beacon-reconstruction in the limited time now left at his disposal. In a spirited gesture several crew members of the "Aware" volunteered to do their bit too, and further speed up the completion of the project.

Cruising up the waters of Port Essington, it was not long before we entered the inner section of the hour-glass shaped harbour and dropped anchor below Adam Cliff, on which Victoria stands. Ferried in the ship's dinghy to the rotting remains of a wooden jetty, we climbed the barely discernible path to the settlement.

We gave special attention to Father Angelo's grave, which many have advocated should be transferred to the crypt of Darwin's St. Mary's Cathedral. If more attention is not forthcoming to maintain the graves at Port Essington in better condition this suggestion may eventually prevail.

With the beacon so fresh in our minds we also examined with special interest the surprisingly well preserved remains of the five classical, Cornish, conical chimneys which are something of a rarity these days. The only other examples I have seen are at Moonta in South Australia. This examination served to support our theory that the design of the beacon was inspired by the chimneys, as it followed very closely the same pattern of construction. Essentially this style consists of a series of random rubble courses comprising hewn stones 38cm in thickness and varying in length from 20 to 30cm, each stone being so cut as to allow the tapering formation of the cone to take shape, as layer upon layer of stone was fixed in position.

Their outer surfaces were slightly curved to accommodate the circular pattern. The sections of the beacon that we found, still partly intact on excavation, followed similar lines and these lines we strove to reproduce in the work of reconstruction.

It was 20 years since I was last here and 11 years since Cedric had visited the area on behalf of the National Trust. My last visit coincided with the end of the 'dry' season and extensive fires had travelled through the area so that the various ruins stood out clearly from quite a distance. It was no problem to discover and visit all the ruins. On this occasion, however, as the 'wet' was well advanced, it was difficult to see more than 1 to 1.5m ahead, so dense was

the undergrowth through which we pushed our way, jumping over loops of vine acting like booby traps, and forcing openings through thick foliage from which we usually received a 'brush off' of green ants that attacked us with considerable ferocity and persistence. In spite of these difficulties we managed to find the ruins of most of the buildings, and to note their further deterioration since our previous visits.

Even though the heat and humidity was intense and we were suffering from the effects of our ordeal coping with the undergrowth, it was with some reluctance that we boarded the "Aware" to return. But it was high time we left if we were to make the rendezvous that we had arranged with Bryan Nye and his "Ardent" at Black Rock, where I was scheduled to offer Mass that evening in the Ranger's residence.

On arrival, Cedric, Bob and I transhipped back to the "Ardent", where we cleaned up and boarded the dinghy that waited alongside to ferry us to the beach below Black Rock. Just a short walk through the trees, where long ago Father Angelo had lived and walked and prayed, and we were setting up for Mass in the home of Bryan and Gerda. From their sitting room we were able to enjoy the magnificent commanding view overlooking the mouth of the harbour, a panorama surrounded by water for three parts of a circle. Once more Mass was to be offered on this spot after a lapse of so many years.

When the time came for Mass, it was the occasion for memories of past days to flood in upon us as we recalled those far-off times of the energetic Missionary from the Tyrol who moved about these parts and sanctified them with his Masses and prayers and labours. Having read and researched so much about his many and varied activities, it was not difficult to reconstruct his life-style; and his presence seemed very close.

I must omit lots of details of his life, many of which I have recalled elsewhere, and merely say that in June 1848 he was not seen at the garrison or around his own house for a few days. As this was unusual, one of the Marines visited his home and found him confined to bed, ill with high fever. He was brought to the settlement and cared for, but did not improve and died not long afterwards. Captain McArthur reported to Archbishop Polding "We buried him with all honours. The entire settlement attended the funeral".

In the diary of the voyage of the H.M.S. Rattlesnake, T. H. Huxley tells of seeing, "a low, little, solitary house that we rightly judged to be the residence of Don Angelo, the Catholic Missionary. When we arrived we learned the poor man had died a short time before our arrival, of a fever under which he had laboured for a week before anyone was acquainted with the circumstances." The "Rattlesnake" sailed into Port Essington on 5th November, 1848.

At the request of Father Ed Travers M.S.C., Parish Priest of St. Paul's in the suburb of Nightcliff, we selected a stone to be used as a holy water font in his church, and brought it back with us.

On my last visit with Bishop O'Loughlin in the Mission lugger, Margaret Mary, 20 years ago, this site was really a remote and desolate one. On that occasion we offered Mass each morning on the deck of our lugger. Today Red Cliffs and Black Rock are the centre of life and activity of the whole region. "Never a dull moment", said Gerda Walsh, "we have lots of visitors (too many at times) from the prawn trawlers, the pearling luggers and Navy patrol ships as well as the many officials from Government departments who frequently drop in by aircraft on our airstrip nearby".

Tonight was certainly such an occasion. A grand barbecue followed Mass under the big milkwood tree in the Ranger's grounds, and after the barbecue the evening ended with the showing of two movies. The sailors of the "Ardent" and the "Aware" had been joined by the crew of a large prawn trawler. Barbecued prawns in unlimited supply added variety to a meal, relished by all. Bryan and Gerda proved admirable hosts.

At the end of the final hard day's work everything was 'ship shape' and ready for inspection, which was duly performed. As we pulled away, everyone was on deck to admire the finished beacon from every angle. The Walsh couple with their two small children, Shaun and Tristen, came aboard by dinghy and we sailed for the famous fishing ground known as the Pinnacle close to the Orontes Reef, so called because a stores vessel of that name leaving the harbour after delivering stores to the settlement hit the reef and managed to limp along to the beach below Vashon Head before going aground. The "Orontes" was one of the group of vessels that came to establish Victoria in the first instance.

Our fishing was reasonably successful and after putting the Walsh family ashore both ships headed homeward about 9.00pm. Outside Darwin Harbour at 7.00am next morning the ships carried out routine manoeuvres and patrolling exercises before re-entering Darwin Harbour and tying up at the jetty, where the ships lay three abreast with H.M.A.S. "Ardent" in the centre.