

# ST PETER'S CATHEDRAL ARMIDALE



## HISTORY

The Cathedral (Foundation Stone 1873, opened for worship 1875, consecrated 1886) replaced the original timber church, which stood on land between the present Cathedral and the Deanery. This, the first Anglican church in Armidale, with its rambling parsonage and stables behind, was opened in 1850, five years after the visit of Bishop Broughton to Armidale, commemorated by the Celtic cross in Beardy Street near the Court House.



*The Celtic Cross near the Court House*

One acre of land was purchased by trustees from the sale of Government land held in Sydney in 1847. Other land was purchased as the years went by, including the site of the present cathedral and deanery, the parish hall, diocesan registry, and five acres of Glebe land for the use of the clergyman, to supplement his stipend. Blocks of land have apparently been resold over the years.



Henry Tingcombe (1846-1854) and Septimus Hungerford (1854-1878) were the first ministers of the parish, which stretched at first from Muswellbrook to Stanthorpe in Queensland.



*The Reverend Henry Tingcombe*

*The Reverend Septimus Hungerford*

Bishop John Francis Turner (1869-1893) opened negotiations with John Horbury Hunt in 1870 for the building of a cathedral, although the first commission had been for extensions to the existing church, in red brick, in the Old English style. It was however, clear that this church, which had already been extended, was too small for the developing community, so a cathedral was envisaged. Bishop Turner, himself a clever craftsman with four years experience and training in London in an architect's office, worked closely with Hunt in the designing and planning of the cathedral. He particularly requested that nave, sanctuary and chancel should be as nearly as possible one, "so that everyone may see and hear perfectly without any architectural obstruction". Bishop Turner did not like Hunt's first design for a cathedral for a stone building, but they were both satisfied with the plans which finally evolved, for a Gothic style brick cathedral, unlike anything ever seen in the colony, small and beautifully proportioned.



*Bishop John Francis Turner*



*John Horbury Hunt*

"I have not asked our architect to reproduce in any way the kind of building we call a cathedral in England. He has studied carefully to give the church a certain stateliness of character, and therein he has succeeded admirably. There is nothing in it fairly chargeable with extravagance, but it is real, honest and true, and shows what may be done with a material too little regarded, viz. common brick".

The architect was John Horbury Hunt, designer of many public buildings and houses in New England and elsewhere in the colony of N. S. W. The common brick was 'Armidale Blue', made from clay dug from the White property at Saumarez, and the building was the first of public consequence to be built by choice from brick, rather than stone. New England granite, used in the keystones in the interior and in blocks on the exterior, was brought by bullock-wagon 15 miles from Uralla; lime came from 74 miles away, through the bush.

Hunt's plans also provided for a chapel, central roof dome, chapter house, tower, and extensions to the sanctuary. Of these, the chapter house, with clergy vestry adjacent, was added in 1910, and the tower in 1938. Some of Hunt's plans, artistically very attractive and architecturally detailed, are in our possession.

In the grounds can be seen the remains of the concrete bases of a wooden bell-tower, dismantled in 1938 when the tower was built, and the bell, 'Maud', was hung near its summit. It is not known if this was the original bell-tower (by Hunt, presumably) or one which he was later commissioned to build. The bell was given in 1870 and recast in 1906.



*Early photograph taken before the Chapter House and Tower were added.  
Note: The wooden Bell Tower in the grounds.*

According to his custom, Hunt wrote meticulous directions on all his plans for the use of materials and the method of building, and came regularly from Sydney to supervise the work and to discuss points with Bishop Turner. This was also done when the Deanery was built in 1891, of the same 'Armidale Blue' brick as the Cathedral. It is interesting to compare the two plans we have for the Deanery, the first of which was rejected by the Cathedral Council, probably on the grounds of economy, due to the depression of the period. It was decided to adopt the second plan which became the present Deanery. Hunt's first plan was considerably more elaborate in conception.

Hunt made great demand on the builders. The mouldings and laying of bricks required special craftsmanship, as did the timber 'scissors' ceiling roof, the toothed lancet windows in a combination of groupings, and the patterned decorations and arches in English bond brick. All these, together with attractive pyramidal chimney tops, the gables and finials, to be seen in both the Cathedral and the Deanery, were trademarks of Hunt's style. Bricks, which he liked and used so imaginatively, were set in fantastically complicated pointing, with hundreds of differently moulded shapes.

### A TOUR OF THE CATHEDRAL



*Flying buttress on the northern side*



*Tower under construction*

Walking around the outside of the Cathedral, notice the heavy supporting buttresses, the decorative flying buttress on the northern side with its granite inscription and the effects and variety produced by the use of arching, toothing, and the many complicated and skilful patterns of the brickwork in general. Salt marl appears where the bricks have weathered over the years, but the foundations have never moved. Hunt insisted that the granite

foundations be left to settle on their ironstone bed for 18 months before he would allow the walls to be built. Notice that the tower, added in 1938, follows Hunt's design, but it is built in brick approximating to the original 'Armidale Blue', which had been long since exhausted.

Above the west (main) door is a band of green tiles, a decoration favoured by both Hunt and Bishop Turner. The niche built into the interior walls, running right round the cathedral, was probably also intended to hold tiles. Above this door, the west windows, which were inserted in 1951, and above this, the Rose window, begin the brilliant mural which beautifies the cathedral and compliments the subdued colour of the brickwork. The windows are seen at their best from the inside in the middle of a sunny afternoon, and from outside at night when the cathedral is lit. They are mainly beautiful examples of late Victorian artistry, and include one given by Bishop Turner in memory of his wife Mary, who died 'At Ramsgate at early dawn, June 25, 1879, in the faith and fear of God. Amen'.



These windows, some of which were made expressly to Bishop Turner's design, were inserted in the period 1882-1891, possibly as gifts to the cathedral. Bishop Turner was delighted to see them replacing the original windows, which he described as "awful." Two of the original leaded windows can be seen in the sanctuary, near the Bishop's stall, or 'Cathedra'.

*Original leaded windows*

The tracery of timber in the roof is expertly arched and adapted to the cruciform shape of the building, which is in essence a small-scale Cathedral, with everything sympathetically in keeping. Septimus Hungerford's statistical return of 1874 showed that the first church, then still in use, had a total of 250 pew "kneelings". This would presumably be the size of the congregation worshipping in the cathedral in its first year, 1875. Bishop Turner would not allow it to be consecrated until 1886, when a "worthy" pulpit and "complete" flooring had been installed. He probably ordered the lectern and other furnishings by catalogue, according to his custom, from England. We have some of the catalogue sketches and pages and some of the letters describing articles which had to be ordered months in advance from England, sent to Sydney or Newcastle by sailing ship or steamer, then transported overland to Armidale by poor roads. The railway was not extended to Armidale until 1883.

The tiled pavement near the present Tower Room door and continuing up the nave aisle and into the chancel and sanctuary were ordered by Bishop Turner from Godwin's in Hereford, and were laid according to his design in a carpet pattern which is perfectly adapted to the cathedral in miniature. They compliment the east windows, also ordered by his design, "sparkling-like". The communion rails were ordered from Hart, Son, Beard and Co., London, to be fitted to "stone steps", the New England granite is used also in the keystones and elsewhere.



The pulpit with its effigy of St. Peter is in sandstone. Bishop Turner ordered gas lamp standards for the cathedral when gas lighting came to Armidale in 1886, which remained until 1922 when electricity became available. Notches in the pews mark the position of the standards. Beneath the present reredos (1921) a band stretches across the sanctuary above the communion table, with the words 'Holy, Holy, Holy', inscribed between the crosses.

Glass doors lead to the Tower Room, opened when the tower was finished in 1938. The junction of the original Cathedral bricks with the newer can be seen at the brick archway. Old photographs show also a door and a window which had to be removed, and the original shingle roof of the cathedral, which was replaced in 1912 by a slate roof which in its turn was replaced by tiles in 1970. Historical displays may be inspected in the Tower Room, including Septimus Hungerford's Family Bible, our collection of Horbury Hunt plans, and early pictures of the Cathedral. From the top of the Tower, a view of the cathedral and city is seen. The Tower was built as faithfully as possible to Horbury Hunt's Gothic-style plan, using a technique of bricklaying understood today by few. It was built several yards to the left of the original site, which was found to have an unstable belt of ironstone. The stairway has thirty-six steps in a central newel, and all bricks are laid in harmonious courses with the main building. There are 150,000 bricks in the tower, and 70 louvres.

The bell, 'Maud', had to be hauled up through landings in the successive stages of building. A ring of eight bells from the Whitechapel Bellfoundry in London was installed in 1966. Changes are rung regularly by a team of Cathedral bell-ringers. Access to the bell-tower is restricted for safety reasons. Further details are in the Tower Room.