

Changi Chapel, Miles Rd, Campbell, ACT , Australia

Photographs



List Commonwealth Heritage List

Class Historic

Legal Status [Listed place](#) (22/06/2004)

Place ID 105188

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Summary Statement of Significance

The Changi Chapel is significant for a range of symbolic associations. It has a special association with the former prisoners of Changi Camp, a World War Two Prisoner of War camp in Singapore, where as the Catholic Chapel it was originally built in 1944 by prisoners held by the Japanese military forces. It reflects the enduring faith of prisoners subject to adversity. The Chapel has a more general symbolic value for all Australian former Prisoners of War as the National Memorial to Prisoners of War, particularly those from World War Two (Criterion G.1). The Chapel is also a rare surviving structure built by Allied Prisoners of War from World War Two. A feature of the simple but refined Chapel, which reflects the adverse circumstances of its construction, is the use of scrounged building materials (Criterion B.2).

Official Values

Criterion B Rarity

The Chapel is a rare surviving structure built by Allied Prisoners of War from World War Two. A feature of the simple but refined Chapel, which reflects the adverse circumstances of its construction, is the use of scrounged building materials.

Attributes

The whole chapel, particularly its form and original fabric.

Criterion G Social value

The Changi Chapel is significant for a range of symbolic associations. It has a special association with the former prisoners of Changi Camp, a World War Two Prisoner of War camp in Singapore, where as the Catholic Chapel it was originally built in 1944 by prisoners held by the Japanese military forces. It reflects the enduring faith of prisoners subject to adversity. The Chapel has a more general symbolic value for all Australian former Prisoners of War as the National Memorial to Prisoners of War, particularly those from World War Two.

Attributes

The whole chapel, commemorative plaques, its landscaping and setting.

Description

History:

Following the entry of Japan into World War Two, its military forces conducted a series of campaigns to gain control over Asia and the Pacific. A key target was Singapore which was the focus of the British presence in the region, including its military forces. Singapore Island was captured by Japanese forces on 15 February 1942 (Wigmore 1957). The fall of Singapore and a series of other campaigns by the Japanese forces resulted in a large number of Allied service personnel, including Australians, being taken prisoner. The surrender of Allied forces on Singapore included about 15,000 Australians. This was by far the largest number of Australians captured in the region during the war. In order to accommodate these and other prisoners, the Changi Gaol was established on 17 February 1942 as the Prisoner of War Headquarters for Singapore. Changi was up to that time a British army barracks. Changi remained a Prisoner of War camp until the end of the war. However, the number of Australians housed there varied because the Japanese used the prisoners as a work force for projects away from Singapore. Notwithstanding this fluctuation in numbers, Changi remained the largest Australian Prisoner of War camp in the region. Prisoners of war from the 8th Division AIF were interned in the Changi Gaol Camp from 1943 onwards and within weeks of their arrival had determined to build a Catholic Chapel. Originally a simple post and beam structure with a frond floor was erected under the guidance of Lieutenants Hamish Cameron-Smith and Hugh Simon-Thwaites. A more elaborate Chapel was designed by Cameron-Smith who was an architect in civilian life. The Chapel evolved over an extended period in 1944 and utilised found materials. It was used as a place of worship until the end of the war. In October 1945 the War Graves Unit, including Corporal Max Lee, spent a few days by chance in the Changi Camp, en route to Sumatra. Corporal Lee made a request to the British to save the Chapel, which was one of the few structures that had not been destroyed by fire. Permission was granted and after extensive photographs were taken and dimensional drawings and sketches were made by Lee, the Chapel was dismantled by a working party of surrendered Japanese personnel. It was crated to Australia in 1947, with the intention that the Chapel be reconstructed as a fitting memorial for 'Prisoners of War who had little recognition for the extreme adversity under which many had lived and died' (attributed to Lee). The crates were stored in the Australian War Memorial where they remained for forty years. The Chapel was finally offered to the Australian Defence Force Academy and in 1987 reconstruction work commenced. The work was undertaken by the Royal Australian Engineer Corps. Following an unsuccessful application for Bicentennial funding the Army launched a Nation wide public appeal for funds. In consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission a site at Duntroon was chosen in the centre of a small parkland close to the Duntroon Chapel. The items inside the crates were marked with alphabetic and numerical codes enabling accurate reconstruction. Included were: the Cross from the roof and roof tiles, panels from above the altar and the altar, most of the floor tiles, two roof beams and struts, timber framing from the side walls, a few pieces of timber trim, corrugated iron skirting, electrical switchboard and electrical light fittings. Missing were two front posts and the remainder of the roof frame. Replacement timbers were provided. Some of the roof tiles were broken. Originally the tiles were from the Malabar tile works and Feroke in India and identical replacement tiles were obtained from Saint Mary's Church at Rose Hill, Sydney. There was no attempt to replace missing floor tiles. Although photographs and sketches from 1945-46 indicate the Chapel was not wired, an electrical switchboard and wiring were found in a crate and this was installed. Paint samples were matched at the, then, Canberra College of Advanced Education and the Chapel painted in its original colours. The Chapel was dedicated as a National Memorial to all Australian Prisoners of War on 15 August 1988, the anniversary of the end of the war and was attended by Max Lee and many of the Changi survivors and their relatives. Both Simon-Thwaites, a Catholic priest in England and Cameron-Smith, an architect in Zambia, were traced though too late to enable them to attend the dedication ceremony. They were subsequently brought to Australia in

May 1990 when Father Simon-Thwaites celebrated mass in the Chapel.

Physical description:

The reconstructed Chapel is an open structure, 12ft by 16ft, made mainly from timber, masonite and galvanised iron. Its pitched roof of reddish terracotta tiles is raised several feet above the walls. The roof is supported by four large wooden posts, one at each corner of the structure. The altar wall at the back of the Chapel is a stepped wall of masonite, painted white with a green trim. The wooden altar is centrally placed and directly above it is a rectangle of green galvanised iron with a white Cross superimposed on it. The sides of the structure are comprised partially of a wall and partially a green altar rail, while the front of the Chapel is a green altar rail only with a small gate at the centre. There is a large light fixed to the centre of the roof which lights the altar. The Chapel has been reconstructed on a concrete slab 20ft by 26ft, with concrete tubs, each with rosemary growing in it, at each corner of the front. In front on the left hand side is a plaque which reads, 'National Prisoner of War Memorial dedicated to the 35,000 Australian servicemen and women taken prisoner in the following wars: War in South Africa, Boer War 1899-1902; World War I 1914-1918; World War II 1939-1945; Korean War 1950-1953'. Unveiled by a former Prisoner of War on 15 August 1988 in front of the right hand side is a plaque which reads: 'This Chapel was originally constructed by prisoners of war in Changi Camp, Singapore Island in 1944. Its construction was an act of enduring faith in the midst of extreme adversity. After the war the Chapel was returned to Australia for preservation. It was erected on this site as a National Memorial to all Australian Prisoners of War on 15 August 1988. Funds for erection and maintenance of this Memorial were provided by public subscription.' The landscape of the site is intended to symbolise the original Changi site. It is built in a grassy parkland, with the axis of the Chapel centred on existing gum trees. Several seats are located in the grassed area in front of the Chapel.

Discussion of significance:

The Chapel is a relocated structure and this raises a question about its significance as a place. Certainly the removal of the Chapel from its original location at Changi has reduced at least one aspect of its heritage value. However, the values of the Chapel have changed. In its original setting its values related to it being a place of Catholic worship for prisoners in the hostile wartime environment of Changi. In its new setting it has become a memorial to all Australian prisoners in four wars although it appears to retain a very particular significance for the former prisoners of Changi. The intrinsic values of the structure have only been marginally affected by the relocation.

History : Not Available

Condition and Integrity

The Chapel is in good condition and is largely intact. The Chapel was originally located at Changi Prisoner of War camp in Singapore but was dismantled and brought to Australia in 1947. It was reconstructed at Duntroon in 1987-88. As part of the reconstruction process some new materials, such as timber posts and roof members and roof tiles, were used to replace missing materials. (August 1994)

Location

Miles and Harrison Roads, Royal Military College, Duntroon, Campbell.

Bibliography

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