
by

David Carment with Helen J Wilson & Barbara James

State Library of the Northern Territory

Darwin 1993
Carment, David


Occasional papers ; no. 41

ISBN 0 7245 0765 5
ISSN 0812–2927

1. Knight, John George.

i. Wilson, Helen J.
ii. James, Barbara.
iii. State Library of the Northern Territory.
iv. Title.
v. Series (Occasional papers (State Library of the Northern Territory) ; no. 41)

994.2903

(The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the publisher.)
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

2. The History of the Catholic Church in the Northern Territory, by Bishop John Patrick O'Loughlin. (1986)
15. (Withdrawn)
18. They of the Never Never, by Peter Forrest. (1990)


27. Rebuilding the Beacon: Point Smith, Port Essington, by Frank Flynn. (1992)


29. The Northern Territory Coast, by John Knight. (1992)


34. The 1124: a Japanese Submarine Wreck in Clarence Strait, by Peter Dermoudy. (1992)

35. Melding of Two Spirits: from the 'Yimin a' of the Tiwi to the 'Yiminga' of Christianity, by Sister Anne Gardiner. (1993)

36. The Best of Both Worlds: Aboriginal Health Then and Now, by Dr. John Hargrave. (1993)


38. Gardening as Environmentalism: a Top End Perspective, by Dr. Dick Braithwaite. (1993)


40. Bugs and Bug Collectors of the Northern Territory: Entomology and Entomologists in the Northern Territory, by Alice Wells. (1993)

INTRODUCTION

This is the text of a talk delivered on 15 April 1992 by David Carment in the State Library's series of 'Under the Banyan Tree' lunchtime entertainments.

David Carment is Associate Professor of History at the Northern Territory University: he was assisted in the research for this paper by Mrs Helen Wilson, a Ph.D. student of the University of Queensland, and the well known Darwin author and historian Barbara James.

William Sowden's quotation in the title aptly describes John Knight, one of the most colourful, able Government Residents the Territory has ever had, and certainly the only Resident to die and be buried in the Territory. Whereas other Residents (and almost all Administrators after them) served their term in Darwin and then returned to Adelaide, Knight was a true Territorian who considered Darwin, not Adelaide, his home.

A "Jack-of-all-trades", Mr. Everything Knight served in almost every government position in Darwin, before being appointed Resident. The architect of many buildings in Darwin, including the Town Hall and Brown's Mart, he turned his hand to many other things, from gold warden to police magistrate.

In this paper David gives us a complete picture of John Knight, and we must be grateful to him for so well documenting the life and achievements of one of the Territory's outstanding public servants and "characters".
Acknowledgement

This lecture is based on parts of a report presented to the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory and funded under the Northern Territory Heritage Grant-in-Aid Scheme 1990/91. The authors are grateful for the financial support provided.
While Northern Territorians this year are quite correctly taking an active role in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and the beginning of Australia's "northern war", we ought not to lose sight of other important anniversaries. One of the most significant of these is the centenary of the death at the Government Residence (later Government House) in Palmerston (now Darwin) in January 1892 of John George Knight. At the time of his passing Knight was the Government Resident, the Territory's most senior official, a position he had held since 1890. But unlike most other occupants of that post, his earlier Territory career had been both lengthy and distinguished.

Born in London in 1824 or 1825, the exact date being uncertain, Knight was trained as an architect and engineer. He migrated to Victoria in 1852 and during the following two decades achieved some fame as a well known architect and as an organiser of international exhibitions. He moved to Palmerston in 1873. From then until appointed Resident he very ably and energetically held a variety of posts: Secretary and Accountant to the Government Resident, Architect, Supervisor of Works, Goldfields Warden, Clerk of the Court, Deputy Sheriff, Special Magistrate, Crown Prosecutor, Official Receiver, Public Trustee and Assistant Returning Officer. He was Commissioner for the Northern Territory at the Adelaide Exhibition in 1887 and the Melbourne Exhibition in the following year.

He was also responsible for the design of most of Darwin's substantial nineteenth century buildings, including extensions to Government House, part of the court house and police station, the infirmary at Fannie Bay Gaol, the Town Hall, Brown's Mart and his own home overlooking the port, an imposing residence known as 'Knight's Folly'. All but the last of these structures, which was later destroyed by fire, are now viewed as significant elements of Australia's built heritage and are on the Register of the National Estate. In addition to actually designing some buildings, he was responsible for the construction and maintenance of several others and developed ideas concerning planning and the use of materials in north Australia which had a long term impact. "An architect", he was the first to observe, "on his arrival in the N.T. must begin his studies anew."1

The paper which follows deals with Knight's last twelve years in the Territory, during which he became its most indispensable official and acquired a place in its history which remains of crucial value.

This was, as William J Sowden's well known book The Northern Territory As It Is testifies, widely recognised at the time. Sowden, a journalist, accompanied a South Australian parliamentary party which visited the Territory early in 1882. His book is a lively account of the visit and in it Knight figures prominently. He acted as both host and tour guide. Sowden found him a fascinating, larger than life personality. In Palmerston, Knight supervised the visitors' "distribution of largesse to the blacks". "The gift", Sowden stated, "was in the shape of flour .... doled out in a grocer's scoop in anything but grocer fashion by Mr Knight".2 The latter advised his companions as they neared the Adelaide River on horseback that the stream "was to be at high flood; and that if they did not get drowned trying to cross it they would be snapped asunder by alligators or eaten up by mosquitoes". The river was, however,
at the most only three feet deep at the strongest running channel and just as we entered it, not knowing this, but bracing ourselves for a fearful struggle, our horses... deliberately stopped and drank.

It was a "sore blow" to Knight, who had "been working up the agony the whole way along". Revenge for this piece of mischief later followed. On a hillside above Mount Wells his horse went under a low-branched tree, pushing its rider from his saddle. "Mr Knight", Sowden wrote, "rode fifteen stone, and did not fall a feather-weight, and a staved-in helmet and a scalp wound testified to the providential character of the escape".

Returning to Palmerston, the parliamentarians learned how Knight was making various provisions for the town's better design and comfort. He was, Sowden commented, "the father, brother, uncle, aunt and numerous other watchful relatives of the place". He had already supervised the clearing and formation of streets and the construction of terrace walks near the wharf. Another project was the government baths, which "Mr Knight has constructed by prison labour on a plan of his own." They were

so designed that even the tide-fall of 24 feet does not deprive the residents of the luxury of sea-bathing, out of range of sharks or alligators, with soles unvexed by sharp-edged rocks.

Knights house was "a cool bungalow-like place of wood and iron and inter-laced bamboo strips, and with more terraces". "It will look", Sowden commented, "like a little Paradise some years hence, but it will hardly ever smell like one." It was right above an "odorous" mud flat, which was suggestive of "piscatorial mortality - of fishy burying grounds."

As Sowden's remarks indicated, Knight's return to Palmerston from the goldfields in 1880 had allowed him much scope to work as an architect and engineer. He was particularly concerned with public buildings and, as already noted, some of the oldest remaining of these in Darwin today were at least partly based on his designs, or were due to his initiative. In many instances Knight worked closely with G R McMinn, the surveyor, and the surviving records are not always clear about the extent to which one or other of the two men was responsible for a particular project.

A building which was constructed entirely to Knight's design was the Palmerston Town Hall. On 1 July 1882 the Northern Territory Times & Gazette announced that the Palmerston Town Council had received tenders to erect the hall, which was to be eighty by thirty feet in dimensions. Knight would supervise the erection and "obtain contractors' signatures that work was done to his specifications". The outside was to be completed in six months and the inside to be finished and handed over before 1 March 1883. On 17 August 1882 the Government Resident, E W Price, laid the foundation stone. For some hours before he did so "a considerable number of citizens", the Times commented, were kept in good humour as Knight showed and explained the building's plans. Price's speech emphasised the building's importance.

This is the first building of its kind erected in Palmerston, and I think it may be considered a sign of progress that the Council could afford to build such a handsome Town Hall. The large room will be eighty feet long by thirty five, [a slight difference from the original specification] and will not be a barn, but a really handsome structure; and the fact that Mr Knight is the architect will be a sufficient warrant that the Palmerston Town Hall will be an ornament to the town. (Cheers.)
A toast was later drunk to the architect and contractors, with Knight responding:

*My long dormant professional qualifications have at last been called into action on a small scale, and I only hope that the Town Hall may be a commencement of a better class of workmanship and a more creditable style in appearance than we have heretofore been accustomed to. It is a great mistake to suppose because a building is plain and ugly that it is necessarily cheap, and it is a further mistake to imagine that a structure which is properly designed and sightly to look at must needs be expensive. The real art of building is to make the most of the materials at your command, and to put them in such form as to please the eye. Next to a beautiful woman there is not a more captivating object than a handsome harmoniously designed building. I have carried out works amounting to many hundreds of thousands of pounds, and I shall be only too happy to spend the funds of the District Council or any other body. Only give me money enough and I will design you a palace.*

As the stone building proceeded, however, not all Palmerston citizens found themselves agreeing with the architect's opinions. On 6 December 1882 "Ratepayer" wrote to the *Times* stating that he could not understand "an architect of Mr Knight's undoubted abilities giving us such a design." "To my unpractised eye", he went on, "the roof is too low-pitched and this will serve to make the building appear out of proportion". Knight's reply was savage:

*When a critic on the merits of a building admits in one line that "he has an unpractised eye", and in another that "he has an uneducated optic", I would like to know on what grounds he presumes to write on a subject of which he confesses his ignorance.*

The Town Hall was finally opened in early March 1883. At a banquet to celebrate the occasion, the prominent businessman V L Solomon made it clear that he and others present did not share "Ratepayer's" views. Proposing Knight's health, he spoke warmly of his ability and the painstaking way in which he had prepared the plans and supervised construction. He deprecated "the newspaper grumblings made in reference thereto by people who foolishly judged" the Town Hall's merits "before it was finished". Knight made a brief reply. During it and on resuming his seat he was, the *Times* recorded, "loudly cheered".

Knights contribution to the design of Fannie Bay Gaol is slightly less clear. He was, as the Deputy Sheriff, in charge of the prisoners there and it is assumed, although not always conclusively documented, that he was responsible for some of the first buildings at the Gaol. On 12 September 1884, for example, he asked the Government Resident for authority to complete two rainwater tanks quarried there. In late 1884 he sent the Resident a schedule of additions required at the Gaol together with a plan. These included an infirmary, a solitary cell, provisions for two female prisoners in a separate enclosure, an office for the gaoler, a room for debtors and a store room. His suggested plan for the infirmary is almost identical with the design of the structure which still bears the name and was erected in 1887. In 1886 he advised the Government Resident that an infirmary was most necessary, again suggesting a plan very similar to that of 1884. Though the evidence is scanty, Knight's report on his work as Deputy Sheriff of 16 January 1886 indicates that he prepared the plans for several other gaol structures. "I have," he wrote, "charge of the labour prison and gaol at Fannie Bay" and went on to discuss the gaol's existing facilities. He did not say so but the report implied that these had been built under his supervision. In a memo to the Government Resident in May 1885 he recalled how in 1880 he had "made out a very strong report on the inefficiencies of the old gaol accompanied by a plan of the cells and other information." After that, he continued, the former gaol was pulled down and a new one erected at Fannie Bay.
Similar logic can be applied to the building now known as Brown's Mart. Constructed in stone as a warehouse for V L Solomon, when completed in June 1885 it was described in the Northern Territory Times & Gazette as the "largest and finest" store "yet raised in Palmerston". Situated in Smith Street nearly opposite the Town Hall, it has a frontage of thirty-eight feet and a depth of eighty feet. There are high walls and a hipped roof. Ample provision was made for ventilation and light with thirteen large windows. The front doors and windows, which the Times noted were "sketched by Mr Knight, architect" were designed to "harmonise with the Town Hall without copying its details". There is no available report which attributes Knight with the entire design but the architectural historian W V Mason later contended it "seems to bear Knight's imprint". There is, of course, little doubt that the form of the Smith Street frontage is his and it is probable that he and Solomon, who had some architectural knowledge, co-operated in planning other parts of the building.

Construction of the stone court house and police station in Palmerston commenced in 1879 and proceeded in stages with both Knight and McMinn being in charge of work at different times. On 20 June 1884, for instance, Knight decided that a verandah would be added to the rear of the court house. In August of the following year he ordered several alterations to rooms there and was responsible in November for having a "punka" installed in the circuit court room. Mason, whose 1968 article is based on exhaustive research of the available evidence, has concluded that the court house and police station buildings "were almost certainly from Knight's hand although no reference to the designer has so far been found". Alan Hammond, the well qualified conservation architect who restored the buildings in the early 1980s, shared this view.

Sowden was correct when he observed that Knight's home in 1882 was picturesque yet inadequate. On 19 February 1883 Knight asked the Government Resident to take note of "the dilapidated condition of the cottage in which I live and to ask you to recommend the Hon the Minister for the Territory to place a sum on the Estimates for 1883/4 to provide me with a new residence". He continued

My present dwelling consists of a sitting room, bedroom, and small kitchen, the two latter are of wood so eaten as to be hanging in shreds. I have had to cover the gable end with a tarpaulin to save the place from being blown away. I have fallen through the floor, which is over 4 feet from the ground and bruised my ribs and there is now only one board on either side of my bed on which one can safely walk.

The Hon Minister will doubtless remember that the cottage stands on very low ground there being [blank] steps down to it from the road.

I propose to build the new one close up to the road excavating the sloping bank for that purpose and forming a basement which would be available for a kitchen, storeroom, servant's room and bath; a sitting room and a bedroom being erected on top starting two feet above the level of the said road so as to secure a little of the sea breeze from which I am now cut off.

The Government Resident, J L Parsons, was sympathetic, recommending Knight's request to the Minister on 20 February. Knight's "present quarters", he went on, "consist of an old weatherboard cottage sent up to the use of the Chief Warden to which an iron room was added. The weatherboard is completely destroyed with white ants". The Minister also agreed that action was necessary and provision for the new house was made in the 1883/4 estimates.

Construction of the residence commenced during the second half of 1883 with prison labour. At least a few Palmerston residents believed that Knight was misusing his
position of Deputy Sheriff by directing prisoners under his charge to undertake such work. On 5 January 1884 the Northern Territory Times & Gazette commented on progress. Knight had, it observed,

designed a novel residence (the whole being built of concrete) and the first two-storied house erected in Palmerston. The site is not a happy one, being on the side of a steep bank, but as there was no better available within view of the sea there was no alternative but to take it. To suit the employment of the material used the building, when completed, will present some of the characteristics of the Norman style. The double verandah, having massive piers and arches all formed in concrete, so that little will be seen of the plain walls which now shows with somewhat undue prominence. The roof is flat, the first of its kind in Palmerston, and finished with an embattled parapet. The walls are 28ft high, and the building when finished will be 61 feet in length by 88 feet in width.

On 4 August 1884 Knight advised Parsons that timber had to be used in the upper verandah rather than the concrete first specified. This substitution was forced on him by the fact that his "right hand man", prisoner Ferguson, would be released from gaol in the next month. Once completed towards the end of 1884, the new house became a prominent feature of Palmerston's urban landscape and remained so until it was destroyed by fire in December 1933. Today only scattered remnants of the foundations are left yet it survives in the memories of many Territorians as "Knight's Folly".

Although architecture was the area where Knight made the greatest impact in Palmerston during the 1880s, much of his time was devoted to the various legal offices which he held. He was not a qualified lawyer yet quickly became acquainted with legal procedures. As Special Magistrate he presided over numerous cases. He soon won respect for his fairness and commonsense. On 1 September 1883, for example, the Times commented that he had imparted a lecture from the bench "in his usual gentle tones". He also often acted as Crown Prosecutor. In this role he often acted with far more humanity than some in the Palmerston community would have supported. The Times criticized him in May 1885 for his tendency to recommend light fines rather than terms of imprisonment and his sympathy towards Chinese defendants. In his capacity of Deputy Sheriff he supervised the prisoners under his control with kindness and understanding. One, Ah Fong, he trained as his own personal servant. In February 1883 he emphasised the need to teach Aboriginal prisoners "the rudiments of masonry". This reflected his view that prisoners needed reform rather than simply punishment.

His interest in and concern for Aborigines under his care was especially noteworthy. Observing that many were skilful artists, in 1887, while he was in Adelaide, he arranged for some of their original sketches and drawings to be exhibited there. The exhibition was entitled "Dawn of Art". The art historian Philip Jones later argued that it was "possibly the world's first exhibition of Aboriginal art as 'art'." Terms such as "ornament" or "decoration" were then generally used for Aboriginal drawings and paintings as they were as far removed from the supposed sophistication of western culture. "The coloured pencil drawings", Jones wrote, of animals and birds are reminiscent of the delicately painted rock art of the Arnhem Land region, and their fineness of line must have surprised Adelaide art lovers. The five artists represented in the exhibition were from different groups in the Darwin region and either worked at the Palmerston (Fannie Bay) Gaol or were incarcerated within it.
The drawings are preserved in the South Australian Museum. They represent the earliest surviving examples of their kind from Northern Australia and in recent years have attracted considerable interest.

Knight's social life remained hectic. The Northern Territory Times & Gazette recorded in 1880 that he and several others regularly enjoyed their "constitutional dip" at the new "bathing ground" on Fort Hill. In June 1881 he took prominent parts in performances of the fourth act of "Richelieu" and the trial scene from "The Merchant of Venice". Knight was, the Times noted, "always ready and willing to take part in promoting amusement and was deservedly encored". Later in the year he was elected to the committees of both the Palmerston Institute and the Palmerston Rifle Club. In May 1882 he was on another committee charged with arranging a "Bachelors' Ball". He appears to have been particularly fond of dancing and in May 1883 chaired a meeting to run "Three Quadrille Assemblies" during the dry season.

During the same month, the Times noted, he was in "splendid form" at the Palmerston Dramatic and Music Society's second performance in the new Town Hall. His "Widow McCree" kept the audience in fits of laughter. During March 1884 he gave the "prologue" at a further musical entertainment. On 11 October that year he appeared at a fancy dress ball as the judge Lord Eldon. Similar activities continued for most of the rest of the decade. Knight's active role in organising cultural and social events was frequently noticed.

During the late 1880s Knight returned to his former role as an exhibition organiser. Granted leave of absence from his duties in Palmerston, on 5 May 1887 he departed for Adelaide where he was in charge of the Northern Territory section of a large exhibition in that city. He enjoyed, the Acting Government Resident advised the Minister controlling the Northern Territory, "the full confidence" of the Palmerston community, which had presented to him on the previous evening a purse of 216 sovereigns. His preparations for the exhibition had been predictably thorough. Among other matters, he had designed a "trophy" to be erected and for a range of exhibits to be carefully packed.

Public reaction to the Territory exhibits was very positive. The Territory Court, as it was known, was opened in late August. The South Australian Register described its principal features in some detail.

The main structure is supported by eight pillars each of which is 2ft 3in in diameter. It is surrounded by an outer verandah, also octagonal in shape...altogether the space covered by the exhibits amounts to 400 square feet. The roof of the structure is composed of bark, the verandah roof is of galvanised iron, and the ceiling of the main structure is made of bamboo....The pillars....are in the form of cement cylinders closely studded with minerals specimens....Rising from the ceiling is a pyramid of Fannie Bay coral....The Curator of the Government Gardens near Palmerston has sent down an exceedingly fine collection of indigenous woods of the Territory. Most of these are nicely polished, and arranged in the form of a log hut....Around the outer and eastern portion of the court are a large number of samples of agricultural produce from the Government Experimental Gardens....Mr Knight also exhibits specimens of rock and building material....Red and black trepang....and sea-coast tortoise shells....adorn the court....A feature of the court is the display of grasses grown in the vicinity of Palmerston....and in the court are samples of paddy....and of dressed rice. Mr George Ryland shows a gigantic potato....grown at Rum Jungle. There are also a few specimens of mangrove.
Also exhibited were bird skins, shells, some of Paul Foelsche's excellent photographs, Aboriginal weapons and handiwork and a variety of minerals. To Knight, the Register stated, "is due the credit of designing and supervising the erection of the whole court - a court which is most artistically laid out and finished". Knight became a popular figure in Adelaide and was given a special banquet by all the other exhibition commissioners. Arriving back in Palmerston in early December, on 2 December over forty of his friends welcomed him home with a banquet at the Town Hall.

While Knight had been able to see his family briefly in Melbourne in 1887 (they did not live with him in Palmerston), he must have been delighted when, in the following year, he was able to spend far more time there. Several of his Palmerston admirers had lobbied the Minister controlling the Northern Territory, J C F Johnson, while the latter was in the Territory, that Knight should be placed in charge of Territory exhibits at the Melbourne Exhibition planned for 1888. Johnson needed little pushing. Already, at a banquet in Palmerston in early April, he had referred to the "elegant" Northern Territory exhibition in Adelaide and the "taste and skill" of his "indefatigable" friend, Knight. The latter was formally appointed Commissioner for the Northern Territory on 2 June and arrived in Melbourne during the following month. The Territory court was not unlike that in Adelaide although Knight used his experience there to make several improvements. His fellow commissioners gave him a complimentary banquet in November and he finally returned to Palmerston on 20 May 1889 looking "all the better for his trip". But his time away had not been entirely happy. He seems to have spent more money on exhibition organisation than was in his budget and complained that certain allowances had not been paid to him. As a result, he informed the Minister on 28 March 1889, he was "out of pocket". "At best", he argued, "I shall be a heavy loser, as I have been lured into some inremunerative speculations which I should have stood clear of had I not been in Melbourne".

By 1890 Knight had reached an age at which many would be considering retirement if they had not already done so. He had been unwell in Adelaide in 1887 and suffered more illness in 1889. In no obvious hurry to return from Melbourne, he must have realised that there were not many active years left to him which could be spent with his family. Events, nevertheless, took an unexpected direction. On 1 January 1890 he wrote to the Government Resident, Parsons, indicating that he might seek election to the South Australian parliament, as a Territory representative and offering his resignation as Returning Officer. The surviving correspondence indicates that he may also have suggested to his superiors that he resign from all his government positions. In the meantime, however, the South Australian government in one of its regular cost cutting exercises had determined to replace both the Government Resident and the Judge with a single appointee. Although his term finished on 31 December Parsons had agreed to stay on until the new Resident was named. Knight was asked in a telegram from the Minister if he would act as Resident in Parsons' place. He agreed and took up his new position on 14 February.

Knight became Acting Government Resident at a time of economic depression in Australia. This had commenced in the Northern Territory well before it did in most other areas. The first economies introduced in the Territory's administration were in 1885 and further cuts in funding followed during the remainder of the decade. Junior public servants were retrenched and several senior officers, such as McMinn, were given new appointments at reduced salaries. Knight's appointment as Acting Government Resident allowed the South Australian government to delay making a permanent appointment and thus bring about another economy in Territory administration. Five months later, on 16 July 1890, the same government announced that Knight had been appointed permanently to the Resident's post. This also saved expense as there were no relocation costs involved. Knight, however, only remained Resident for eighteen months. He died in office on 10 January 1892.
As Resident, Knight was responsible to the government for all aspects of the Territory's administration. His salary and allowances were initially £850 per annum "to cover everything" and these were later increased to £1 000. Following Parsons' departure he moved his home to the Government Residence, a building with which he had a long association. There he followed the tradition set by his predecessors in taking responsibility for a range of social functions.

A clear impression of Knight's view of his role as Resident came from the only annual report, for the year 1890, he presented to the South Australian parliament. He devoted much attention to the proposed transcontinental railway, which he hoped would allow the line that already connected Palmerston with Pine Creek to be extended to Adelaide. He also discussed the Territory's Chinese population, discounting the widely held view that Chinese miners were invading "alluvial ground worked by Europeans". His views on the pastoral industry were pessimistic but, as later events showed, quite realistic. "Unless," he wrote, "an artificial supply of water be obtained by some means or other...cattle breeding will not pay to continue in the dry portions of the Territory". He was just as pessimistic about mining for copper, silver and tin. The "prosecution of these promising industries", he observed, "has all but collapsed". Gold mining, though, had increased. The "production of the nobler metal during the past year", he noted, "is a fact of which we have much to be grateful for". Part of the reason for this was the diligence of the Chinese: "the best of the Chinese miners are working quartz reefs on their own account, and in many instances are doing very well". He commented that agriculture in the Territory was still on a small scale, expressing the hope that

the liberal provisions of the new Land Act, which permits free selection before survey, may lead some people to set to work in earnest to cultivate on a larger scale than mere market gardening

"Having indulged in a good deal of lamentation over the existing state of things", he concluded with "some suggestions by way of remedy". These included the building of the transcontinental railway, a special loan of £50 000 to "be contracted for the development of the resources of the Northern Territory" and that the disposal of this fund, which would cover some years, be entrusted to commissioners. "My recommendations", he asserted, were designed "to change the mode of dealing with the affairs of the Territory from a retail to a wholesale line of policy". Knight was "sorry that my task has not evoked more praise" yet had not lost his faith in the Territory. He continued at the close of his life to believe, as he had for many years, that a "bold, liberal, and comprehensive administration of its affairs in the future will bring about a grand change for the better".

In spite of hard economic times, he felt that his goals could be implemented. In the estimates of revenue and expenditure he prepared for the government in June 1890, he offered the following observations:

If I were asked to state in one sentence why the Territory has failed to progress as expected, I should say, through the lack of a definite progressive policy in administration, consequent on too frequent changes of ministry, the political head having to retire just when he began to know something of the business of governing the settlement, to make room for another who had to commence taking his first lesson and going over the old ground as before.

Twice the Territory has been a Free Port and long before there was time to determine whether the experiment was going to turn out successful or otherwise, customs duties were again enforced, while we now have a special Tariff, exceptionally high.
At times also we have had liberal estimates and a fair allowance for public works following by a reaction in which things were cut down to starvation level.

The only remedy, in Knight's view, was an injection of government funds into areas of economic activity such as gold mining, which had the potential for further growth, combined with "a fresh start altogether". He argued that the name of the Northern Territory should be changed and suggested "North Australia" as an alternative. There ought also, he stated, to be local government "by a composite Council partly nominees of South Australia and partly chosen by the people here".

The government failed to adopt many of Knight's recommendations and much of his time as Resident was spent in fighting for funds to support what he regarded as essential and minimum public services. On 8 July 1890, for example, he forwarded to the Minister a report from W G Stretton on the Borroloola district with the comment, "All Mr Stretton's recommendations are entitled to serious consideration as he has the welfare of his District so thoroughly to heart." "I only trust", he continued, "the Honourable the Minister may see his way clear to start the artesian bore which Mr Stretton prays for." On 11 July he complained to the Minister that funds were desperately needed to repair the fence at Fannie Bay Gaol. Another request for funds reflected the severity of the depression in Palmerston. On 29 October 1890 Knight sent a telegram to the Minister which indicated how desperate conditions had become.

"Trust you will uphold vote on my estimates for destitutes. Am continually worried by applicants for work who ought not be allowed to starve - pay 5/- a day. If give relief rations get no return. Some of those temporarily employed manage stow away steamers. If term relief destitute be preferred work might be omitted only beg that amount be upheld. We cannot ignore cases of absolute destitution. Yesterday man solicited employment and on being told nothing for him to do replied could not starve have to do something be sent gaol get food unprofitable for state to breed criminals."

Though in some cases, such as that just discussed, funds were found, Knight's constant battle for money had a wearing effect on him. He also discovered that his own salary was insufficient for the expenses associated with the Resident's position. On 28 October 1890 the Minister asked Knight to step down as Assistant Returning Officer so that Paul Foelsche, the Inspector of Police, could be appointed to the post and get the additional salary it provided. Knight seemed most upset by this and was able to retain the post after an appeal to the Minister. He was less successful after he complained to the government in January that his salary and other allowances did not meet "the cost of keeping up a decent appearance at the Residence". "I have", he complained,

"spent a lot of money on furniture and decoration out of my own pocket so that the establishment is now fit to receive His Excellency the Governor, the Defence Commission or any other travelling notabilities."

The Minister was unsympathetic, curtly advising Knight that his existing payments could not be increased. It came as no surprise when the latter advised the Public Service Commission in Adelaide on 17 April 1891 that he was far from happy with the difference between his annual salary and allowances of £1,000 and those of the previous Resident which amounted to £1,624.10.0.

There were, however, some aspects of his post which he obviously found very satisfying. One was the opportunity it provided to make improvements to the Government Residence. Not long after he moved in, his architectural eye discovered
how extensively the stone on the building's exterior had rotted away. In order to arrest
the decay he covered the defective stone work with a special cement. Another
enjoyable activity involved his preparations for a museum in Palmerston. This would,
he advised the Minister on 16 August 1890, be concerned with mining and natural
history and, he hoped, be located in his former residence. Once established, he
observed, the museum would provide another place for visitors to Palmerston to
inspect besides the botanic gardens and gaol. Unfortunately for the Northern
Territory, his death meant that the project was abandoned and no museum of the type
he supported appeared until the 1960s.

As they had since the 1870s, Knight's official duties required expertise in diverse
areas. He remained a special magistrate, presiding over some quite complex legal
cases. He was also, as mentioned above, Assistant Returning Officer, in which
capacity he organised the first elections for Territory representation in the electorate
of Flinders in the South Australian parliament. Other functions, which he still
retained after he became Resident, included membership of the Licensing Bench and
Public Trustee.

His social activities were particularly wide ranging. In May 1890 he presided at
Aboriginal sports. During the same month he also supervised a mineral show and
"conversazione". The hostess on this and many other official occasions was Mrs H H
Adcock, the young wife of the then Chairman of the Palmerston District Council, (throughout Knight's time as Resident his wife Alice was living in London). In June
1890 he was elected Patron of the Darwin Cricket Club. During April of the
following year he hosted the Governor of South Australia, Lord Kintore. He
organized a banquet and a ball at the Residence and an Aboriginal corroboree for the
vice-regal visitor as well as presiding over two other banquets, one by Europeans and
the other by Chinese, which Kintore attended. In the same month he became Patron
of the Northern Territory Athletic Association and the Northern Territory Racing
Club. During July his youngest son, Walter, joined him. He remained in
Palmerston until Knight's death, securing employment as a telegraph operator.
In October Knight chaired a lecture by J Y Parkes, a visiting Inspector of Mines, on the
mineralogy of the Northern Territory, attended a fancy dress ball as the King of
Diamonds, hosted a farewell for Parkes, and gave his patronage to a visiting "aeronaut and acrobat" who went up in a balloon and then parachuted down.

On 30 October 1891 he was appointed as judge for the forthcoming Circuit Court yet his health had taken a sudden turn for the worse and there was some doubt as to
whether he could handle this onerous responsibility. The Northern Territory Times &
Gazette reported on 20 November that the "estimable Government Resident" was
much troubled by bronchitis, which had partly incapacitated him for official duty.
Knight himself sent a telegram to the Minister on 3 December stating that influenza
was very prevalent at the hospital and "self half dead".

The end came suddenly. Knight appeared in early January to have recovered from his
bronchitis and influenza when he was the victim of a severe asthma attack. In spite of
the attentions of Dr O'Flaherty, he died on the evening of Sunday, 10 January 1892.
"We cannot recall", the Times reported, "anything that created so universal a feeling
of sadness as the decease of this honoured and honourable servant of the Crown and
friend of the people". The next day flags in Palmerston were everywhere at half-
mast and public offices and businesses were closed as Knight's funeral cortège moved
through the town, "Europeans, Chinese and Malays were all", the Times stated.

mingled together in vehicles, on horseback or walking and even the
Aboriginals, realising, no doubt, the full extent of the many kindnesses shown
to them by the deceased, took this opportunity of testifying their gratitude.
A service took place at the grave in Palmerston Cemetery\textsuperscript{104} and then were

\begin{center}
\textit{consigned to earth the mortal remains of one whose history, if it could be told, would surely be pleasant reading from the opening chapter to the finale.}\textsuperscript{105}
\end{center}

There were many tributes. The \textit{Times} described him as a "devoted friend to the Territory" who "never once wavered in the belief of its future greatness".\textsuperscript{106} He was not forgotten in Melbourne where the \textit{Argus} on 12 January praised his varied accomplishments in Victoria and reported that "those who knew Melbourne in the fifties and sixties" received the news of his passing "with sentiments of genuine regret".\textsuperscript{107} Rather belatedly, funds were raised from the Palmerston community during August 1906 for the erection of a head stone over his grave.\textsuperscript{108} As the \textit{Times} commented on 15 February 1907,

\begin{center}
it is not often that a man's friends in life want to visit his grave many years after his death, and it says much for the sterling qualities of the late Mr J G Knight, that every visitor to Palmerston who knew him in the days gone by when he was Government Resident, shows the respect felt for his memory by visiting his grave, if at all possible.
\end{center}

Knight had never been able to save much money and his estate was quite small. It was sworn in February 1892 not to exceed £800. The Will directed that most of this should be divided among members of his family, with his wife receiving the largest share. At the time of his death his family were well scattered.

Only his son, Walter, was with him in Palmerston. His wife, Alice, was in London, two of his daughters had married and settled in New Zealand, and the remainder of the children were in Victoria.\textsuperscript{110}

His most important legacy was the contribution he made to his adopted country. In both Victoria and the Northern Territory he did much in an almost bewildering variety of roles to advance Australia's development. While architecture was only one of his areas of achievement, his surviving buildings are today an impressive and particularly appropriate memorial.
ENDNOTES

1 For details of Knight's career before 1880 see David Carment, "Knight, John George" in David Carment, Robyn Maynard and Alan Powell (eds), Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography Volume One to 1945, Darwin, 1990.


3 Ibid, p 35


5 Ibid, p 129

6 Ibid p 132

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 For interesting discussion on this point see "Report of the Public Works Department for year 1912", in National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory), Darwin office, site file 6/302.

10 Northern Territory Times and Gazette (hereafter NTTG), 1 July 1882.

11 Ibid, 19 August 1882

12 Ibid

13 Ibid, 9 December 1882

14 Ibid, 16 December 1882

15 Ibid, 10 March 1883

16 Knight to Government Resident, 12 September 1884, in Northern Territory Archives (hereafter NTA), Correspondence to Government Resident (hereafter CGR), Northern Territory Record Series (hereafter NTRS) 790, A7199.


18 Knight to Government Resident, 23 August 1886, in Ibid A9322.


20 Knight to Government Resident, 18 May 1885, in State Records of South Australia (hereafter SRSA), Correspondence to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory (hereafter CMCNT), GRS 1, 716/1885.

21 NTTG, 27 June 1885.


Knight to R J Morice, 20 June 1884, in NTA, CGR, NTRS 790, A6944.

Knight to Government Resident, 17 August 1885, in Ibid, A8300.

Knight to Government Resident, 18 November 1885, in Ibid, A8584.

Mason, "Documents on Australian Architecture", p 485.

Alan Hammond, conversations with David Carment, 1983.

For the full correspondence see SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 193/1883.

NTTG, 20 October 1883.

NTTG, 5 January 1884

Knight to Government Resident, 4 August 1884, in NTA, CGR, NTRS 790, A7031.

NTTG, 1 September 1883.

Ibid, 30 May 1885.

Knight to Government Resident, 12 July 1884, in NTA, CGR, NTRS 790 A6973.

Knight to Government Resident, 19 February 1883, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS1 193/1883.


Ibid, pp 165–166

Kaye R Clark, Curatorial Officer, Anthropology, South Australian Museum, to David Carment, 15 August 1991. The items are registered at AA169.

NTTG, 2 October 1880.

Ibid, 4 June 1881

Ibid, 15 October 1881

Ibid, 22 October 1881

Ibid, 20 May 1882

Ibid, 12 May 1883

Ibid, 26 May 1883
Ibid, 22 March 1884

Ibid, 11 October 1884

Acting Government Resident to Minister, 5 May 1887, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 322/1887.

Acting Government Resident to Minister, March 1887, in Ibid, GRS 1, 228/1887.

Cited in NTTG, 10 September 1887.

Ibid, 5 November 1887.

Ibid, 3 December 1887.

Knight to Minister, 1 August 1887, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 603/1887.

NTTG, 14 April 1888.

Ibid, 7 April 1888.

Ibid, 2 June 1888

Minister to Government Resident, 10 July 1888, in NTA, CGR, NTRS 790, A11127.

NTTG, 20 October 1888.

Ibid, 24 November 1888.

Ibid, 25 May 1889.

Knight to Minister, 28 March 1889, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 253/1889.

Certificate from Dr Wood, 21 May 1889, in NTA, CGR, NTRS 790, 711.

Knight to Government Resident, 1 January 1890, in Ibid, 1276.

See Ibid, 1279, 1281.

North Australian, 29 November 1889; Telegram Minister to Government Resident, 22 January 1890, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 1633/1890.

Minister to Government Resident, 3 January 1890 (received by Knight on 6 January), in Ibid, 1421. [Friday to Monday. Parsons sat on it over the weekend.]

North Australian, 14 February 1890.

Minister to Chief Secretary, 18 May 1890, in SRSA, CMCNT GRS 1, 432/1890.

Knight to Minister, 12 January 1890, in Ibid, GRS 1, 30/1891.

"Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1890", in South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 28/1891.

Knight to Minister, 7 June 1890, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 406/1890.

Knight to Minister, 8 July 1890, in Ibid, GRS 1, 500/1890.

Knight to Minister, 11 July 1890, in Ibid, GRS 1, 520/1890.

Knight to Minister, 29 October 1890, in Ibid.

Knight to Minister, 28 October 1890; Minister to Knight, 19 November 1890; Knight to Minister, 11 February 1891, in Ibid, GRS 1, 708/1890. [Bloomfield Douglas, the first Resident, was paid £1 000].

Knight to Minister, 12 June 1891; Minister to Knight, 29 June 1891, in Ibid, GRS 1, 30/1891.

"Royal Commission into Public Service" in South Australian Parliamentary Papers, 30A/1891, p 215.

North Australian, 21 February 1890.

Knight to Minister, 16 August 1890; 15 September 1890 and 18 September 1890, in SRSA, CMCNT, GRS 1, 534/1890. See also NTTG, 29 August 1890.

For an example see NTTG, 3 July 1891.

North Australian, 25 May 1890.

Ibid, 7 March 1890.

NTTG, 24 October 1890.

North Australian, 2 May 1890.

Ibid, 9 May 1890.

NTTG, 20 June 1890.

Ibid, 3, 10 and 17 April 1891.

Ibid, 3 April 1891.

Ibid, 24 April 1891.

Ibid, 17 July 1891.

Ibid, 11 December 1891.