
Scribblings on Cyclone Tracy

Subject

Mark

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Chapter 1

Scribbling's from Mark Walker on Cyclone Tracy

On Christmas day 1974, about 1am, I had driven down Bagot Road from a house in Waters Street in Rapid Creek where I had been attending a small Christmas Eve celebration with a few family friends, to my parent's home in Porter Street, Ludmilla where I was living. When I was driving along Bagot Road I could feel the vehicle slowly moving across the road. It was a relief to arrive home.

My parents were on annual holidays in Mexico and Guatemala, when they were advised of Cyclone Tracy had damaged Darwin. They were in the middle of the Guatemalan jungle near some Mayan pyramids. A staff member from the hotel where they were accommodated tracked them down and handed them a telegram from the Speaker Bern Kilgariff, the text of telegram read "Mark okay, please return as soon as possible" or similar.

<image or text of telegram to come>

On the return to Australia my parents learned that only men were allowed to return to the city in the mistaken belief that women and children were unable to cope. Mum was one of those people who spent a lot of time in the garden, kept a tidy house and assisted my father in most aspects of house maintenance. The suggestion that she couldn't cope was grossly inadequate however she was forced to stay in Melbourne with relatives and then to Perth to stay with her daughter.

The evacuation of women and children did show that Darwin had some 'strange women'. As one of the flights was being boarded, one of these women was at the top of the stairs, about to enter the cabin and before she could do so a gust of wind dislodged his wig. He was very embarrassed naturally. There are other similar stories of young men in their 20's boarding aircraft looking pregnant.

Claims by unscrupulous people – I had been contacted several times concerning my photographic equipment. The Government was offering to compensation for lost property and receipts of purchase goods as Darwin was in a mess it was difficulty if not impossible to produce receipts of purchase or proof of ownership. My photographic equipment at the time was worth around \$6000 and consisted of two camera bodies, several lenses, an enlarger, film processing tanks, processing dishes and other such instruments. After a couple of these inquiries I realised that the inquirer was claiming to have had some of this equipment was seeking compensation. I was not the only target. Not much of this occurred fortunately. My personal view was the Government was far too generous in some of its offers.

Underground Power – The damage to the Darwin power supply caused by Cyclone Tracy was a concern. Not many businesses had backup power supplies. An announcement was made by the Executive Member responsible that all power cables would be housed underground. After a while the project was abandoned as it was too expensive.

David McCann came to Darwin in 1970. He was Chief Magistrate at the time of Cyclone Tracy. On 30 December 1974, Mr McCann had sentenced an Aboriginal, Guldin Kelly, to nine months' jail for obtaining liquor under false pretences when Major-General Alan Stretton interrupted the proceedings of the Court. He later apologised for his unwise interference.

One comment from Ron Withnall, MLA 'He gets my vote for the Denis Bloodnok award'.
(Major Denis Bloodnok, military idiot and former plumber's mate)

Had the Legislative Assembly been sitting would have the Major-General done the same? Probably.

The question of how serious the 'locals' considered the warning that a cyclone was approaching their city has been a topic for discussion. The view was that this sort of weather is common for the time of the year and more than likely won't come to anything. The ABC weatherman (Lindsay Wright) commented at the end of his forecast 'this time it looks like something might develop'.

Following the passing of Cyclone Tracy, rumours started to circulate, the first being that the cyclone was returning. Following the arrival of Alan Stretton and Tony Powell the rumour that Darwin was not going to be rebuilt and a satellite city was planned near where Palmerston. There was some resentment at the Federal Government intervening as the 'locals' had just achieved their first step towards self-government with the election of a fully elected Legislative Assembly. The old Legislative Council contained some government appointed members.

Chapter 2

Family Home - 16 Porter Street

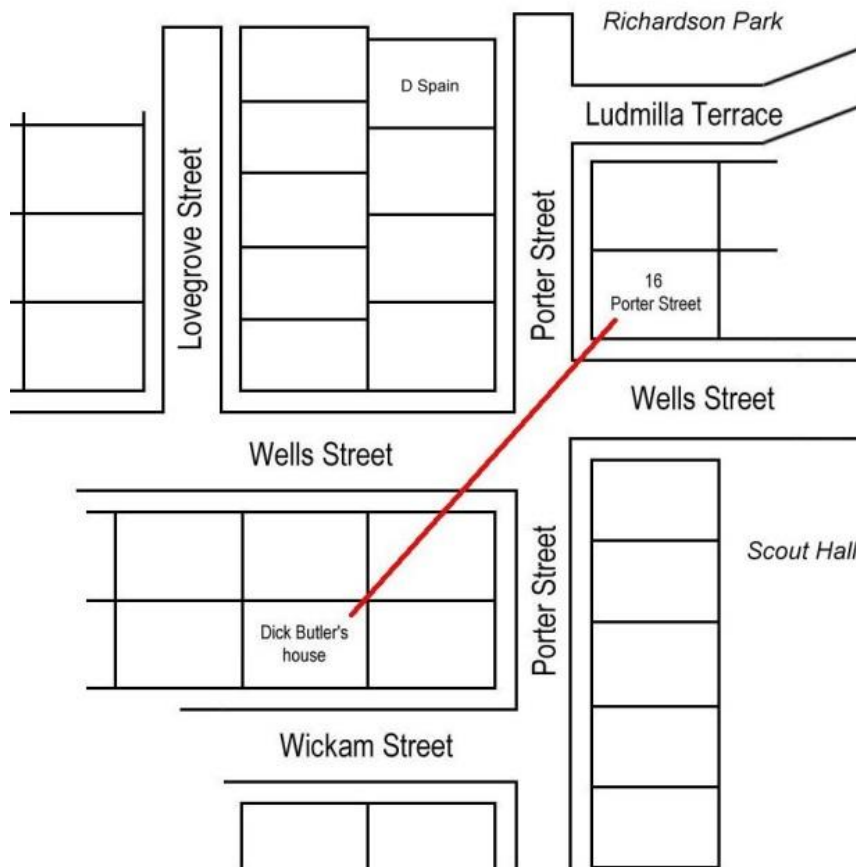
While I was waiting for my parents to return to Darwin, I noticed a person wandering around the property, when I inquired on his business, he told me he was a social worker surveying properties to house families and then suggested that I could share the accommodation with others or would be relocated and a family placed in the house. No questions were asked regarding the whereabouts of the owner. I had heard reports of groups of individuals and families who had been displaced because their accommodation had been destroyed, occupying houses and flats that gave the appearance of being unoccupied or left vacant due to the cyclone. There were suggestions that were being sold by persons pretending to be the owner and unable to produce the title or deeds to the property as the documents had been lost in the cyclone. Until my parents returned, I expected to arrive home and find the house occupied, fortunately this did not happen. Had the situation occurred, I don't know how I would have told a family they could not stay in the house when, as the sole occupant at the time, there were two dry bedrooms, a dry living room and working kitchen and bathroom. The neighbours around kept an eye on the property. Later in the week another 'creature' was wandering on the property and noticed I was collecting some of the belongings from the main bedroom that had been removed by the flying roof, he inquired on my activity and after he established certain facts he advised me he was an engineer and in his opinion the house had to be demolished as the owner was not known or not contactable. I advised him that my parents were the owners and they were overseas. His comment was *'I've heard stories like that!'* I was a

relief when at least one of my parents returned. The social worker and the engineer were from interstate and would not provide any names.

The family home in Darwin was at 16 Porter Street in the suburb of Ludmilla. During the cyclone the house was damaged by a flying roof from Dick Butler's house in Wickham Street some 400m directly across. The flying roof demolished the main bedroom and with the assistance of the wind spread the contents of the room over the property, for months after we were finding mum's jewellery in the garden. Like most long-term home owners who planned to stay, my father set about responsibly securing the building and planning the rebuilding of the family home.



16 Porter Street, a couple of days after Cyclone Tracy.



Map of the area (at the time) showing the 'flight path' of Dick Butler's roof.

As a footnote, Dick Butler's wife Lou was killed during the cyclone. Dick was the gardener at Government House.



The scene from the front garden of 16 Porter Street looking up Wells Street towards Fannie Bay.

Due to the destructive force of Cyclone Tracy, the Darwin Reconstruction Commission imposed a monetary limit on how much home owners could spend on repairing the damage caused by the Cyclone. The amount was insufficient and needed to be increased, from time to time. The rebuilding and repairs being made to private homes was a concern

to the Commission. Owners were mostly responsible in making temporary repairs. To prevent owners making unsafe repairs the Commission imposed financial limits to the repairs before building approval was needed.

Depending on the damage to your home determined the need to have the home made 'cyclone proof' or be issued with an 'engineer's certificate. The need for all homes to provide a room that could be used as a cyclone shelter was suggested.

The Darwin Reconstruction Commission wisely surveyed the area and issued, from time to time various 'directives' effecting building or repair to buildings. A directive that effected a home owner at the Ludmilla end Porter Street was the repair to buildings in tidal surge zones. Prior to Cyclone Tracy work had commenced on the new Casuarina Hospital in the suburb of Tiwi. It was drawn to the attention that the hospital, complete with snow eves, was located in a tidal surge zone, the building of the hospital continued and was completed in mid-1980. The hospital was renamed the Royal Darwin Hospital. The owner of the home at the end of Porter Street was none other than the CEO of the hospital Mr Denis Spain.



A closer view of the damaged part of 16 Porter Street. Prior to Cyclone Tracy, the vehicles were hidden by a row of Arailia trees (arailia spinosa). In this picture the 'stumps of the trees can be seen. The trees were sheared off by flying corrugated iron.

All damage buildings were photographed regularly and, if in the view of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission repairs had been carried out was estimated to exceed the 'permitted amount', the owner was sent, by registered mail advice and a threat to prosecute should work continue without approval.



The construction of the main bedroom.

During the re-building of 16 Porter Street, my father secured the services of a builder to supervise the work. Julian and a friend came up from Perth to Darwin and helped my father with the re-construction.

The threats from the Darwin Reconstruction Commission to prosecute owners who made unauthorized repairs was ignored from the most senior public servants down. Owners were more concerned with keeping their families safe than worrying about what the Darwin Reconstruction Commission was trying to do. Local lawyer and first NT Judge to be appointed to the New Supreme Court, Dick Ward, QC, was of the opinion that the *Darwin Reconstruction Commission Act* would not stand up in court and expressed his opinion freely.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

P.O. Box 231, Darwin. N.T. 5794

Telephone: 819560

Urban Development & Town Planning
Building Section
"Moonta House"
Mitchell Street
Darwin. N.T.

2-6-75

To F.H. & P.J. WALKER
LOT 3335 PORTER ST
FANNIE BAY

Please be advised that all owners or their agents who have building work in progress within 40KM of the Darwin Post Office, that it is essential to Register with the N.T. Building Board, Ground Floor, Moonta House, Mitchell Street, Darwin, because all unregistered work is liable to a Stop Work Notice and penalties under the Darwin Reconstruction Act could be applied.

TEMPORARY WORK

In most cases over the counter approvals can be given to minor work not exceeding \$5,000. Plans and specifications to accord with the 1975 edition of the N.T. Building Manual will be required within 18 months. (This revised manual incorporates the new anti-cyclone building provisions.)

PERMANENT REPAIRS OR REBUILDING

Permits for this work must be obtained from the Building Section and will have to conform to structural requirements in accord with the 1975 edition of the N.T. Building Manual.

Acknowledgement of this notice is required within seven (7) days of receipt.



(L.A. ROBINSON)
Architect
Building Section

Chapter 3

The Parliamentary Precinct

The 'new' Legislative Assembly had been elected on 19 October 1974 and met for the first time on 20 November 1974 only a few weeks before Cyclone Tracy passed through Darwin. The Executive Members (the forerunner to the Ministry) were thrown in at the deep end to deal with the disaster.



*The view from the Esplanade of the Legislative Assembly chamber.
The building in the background is Block 6.*

On my father's (Fred Walker) return to Darwin on 2 January 1975 he was collected at Darwin Airport and taken into the Legislative Assembly to prepare, with the Deputy Clerk, Keith Thompson, for a sitting of the Assembly later that day.

The Parliamentary Precinct had no electricity. The recording of the debates was done using battery-powered tape recorder, one being a 5 inch reel portable *Uher 4400* stereo recorder belonging to me. Lighting in the Chamber was done with gas lights. The ringing other bells to commence the sitting or indicate a division was about to take place was done by Graham Gadd, the salaries clerk, who walked around banging two rubbish bin lids together.



*The Legislative Assembly lawn and car park.
Block 3, the Nelson building in the background.*

The Nelson building, also known as Block 3, prior to the building of the new Parliament House provided temporary accommodation for Hansard, Parliamentary Library, Table Office, Personnel and Members offices.

The malina trees that bordered the gardens of the precinct were easily stripped of their foliage and in some cases uprooted.



Block 3 — Nelson building on the left and the Block 8 — Chan building at the rear of the Legislative Assembly offices.



The dedicated staff tidying the garden in front of the administration offices. from the left, Tommy Thompson (Gardener/Cleaner), Les Brooking (Hansard), Graham Gadd (Personnel), Paul Stewart (Hansard), Gerry Thorn (Personnel), Ray Chin (Clerk-Assistant) and John Tracey (Gardener/Cleaner). The caravan and car belong to Gerry Thorn and his wife who were given permission to live on the precinct until accommodation could be found.



The roof of the Assembly's garden store and printery after the cyclone.



The Staff room (left) offices of the Clerks (center), Reception (right). The mailna trees near the offices were easily stripped of their leaves and uprooted by the cyclone. The building at the near the Chan Building, also known as Block 8 is where the Executive Members worked.



This view is from outside Block 2 looking at the Member's garden (left) and the PABX rooms (right).



The Members' garden in the foreground, Members' Bar (left) and the Member's Library (right).



Inside the Members' Bar after the initial clean-up.

The new Parliament house removed all but a sample part of the old Post Office wall which was not damaged by Cyclone Tracy.



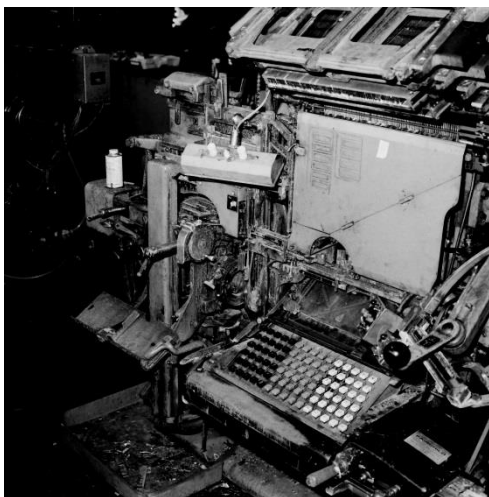
Chapter 4

Government Printing Office

My workplace, the Government Printing Office, was destroyed. The Printery at the time was located at the rear of the Legislative Assembly which was close to the harbour shore.



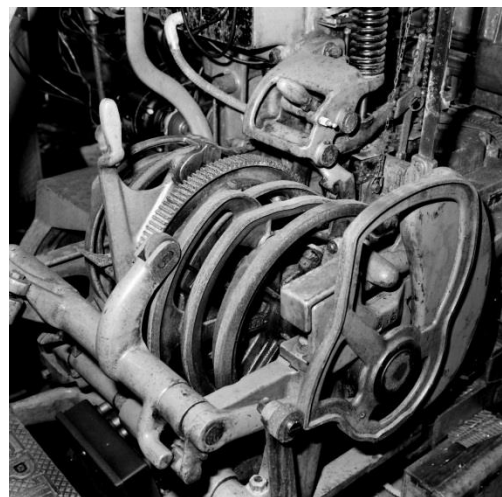
The roof was blown off the building and the salt water spray covered a lot of the printing equipment and the galleys of type, mainly *Hansard*, waiting to be composited. The Cyclone did the Printery a favour as the machinery was ancient and needed replacing. The rest of the world was changing over from hot type to cold type.



The keyboard and casting side of an Intertype.



The cams of the Intertype covered in rust. A colour picture would provide a better understanding of the scene.



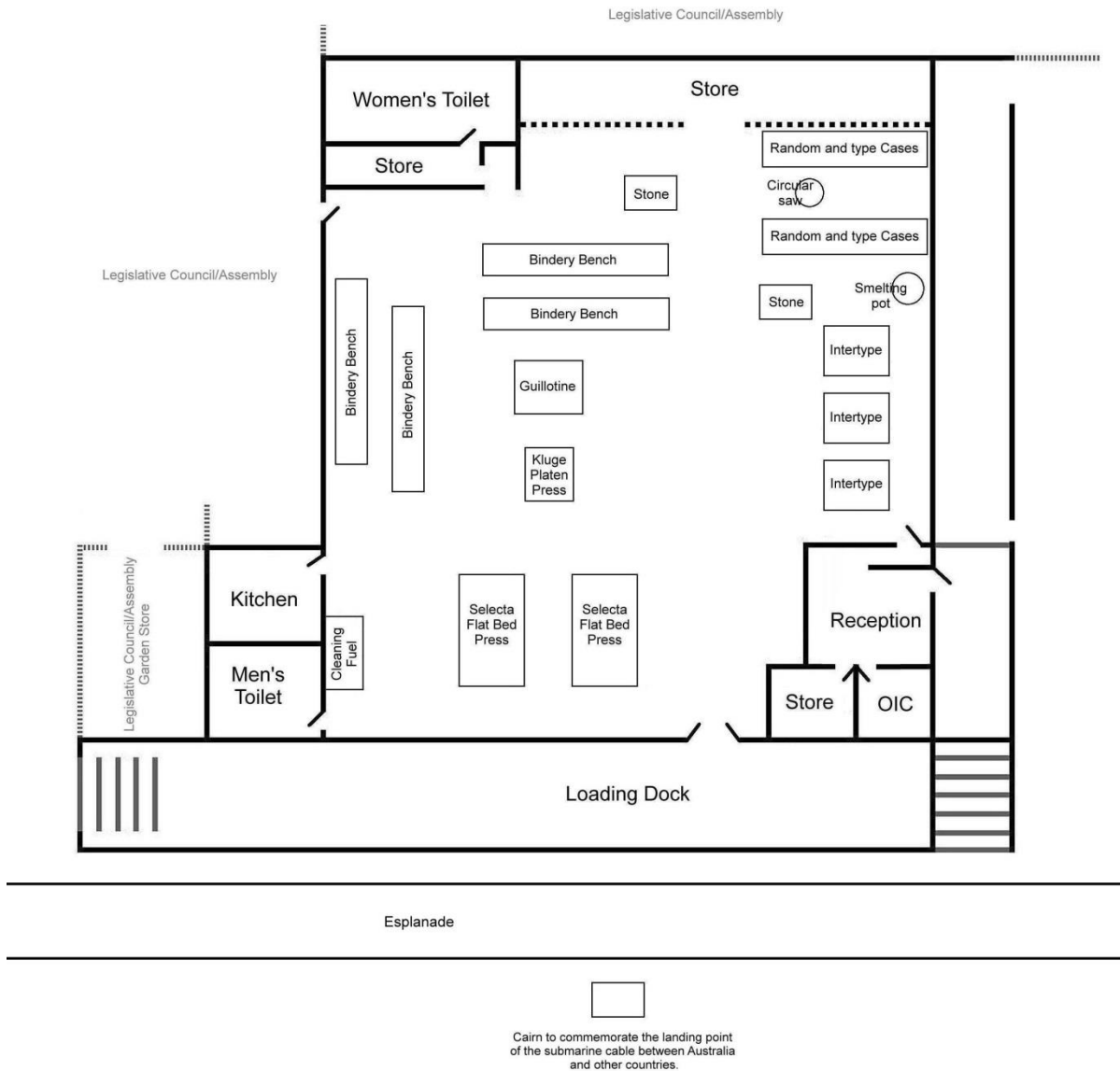
Colour pictures of the printery were taken on the request of the Commonwealth Government Printing Office. As there was no colour processing chemicals immediately available in Darwin I was unable to produce prints. The film was processed in Canberra.



← Part of the composing area.

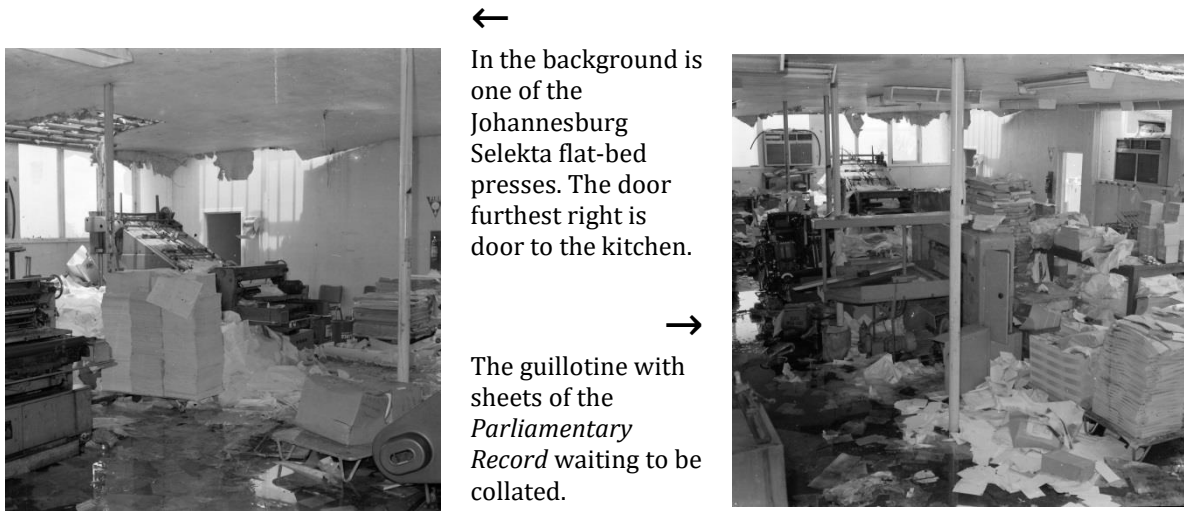


→ Reception and Des Sydes office.



After Cyclone Tracy the layout style of legislation changed from using sidenotes to headings. The style change made it possible for legislation to be prepared by the Legislative Draftsman. This

process bypassed the need for the involvement of the Government Printing Office apart from the printing. Other documents to change were the *Government* and *Police Gazette*.



A temporary Sub-office was set up in the old Drug Houses of Australia building in McMinn Street next to the Shell depot. This building was a vast improvement on the original printery.



The establishment of 'Document Reproduction Unit' in the basement of Block 6 was the first step in modernising Government printing in Darwin.



Printing of the *Building Code* – The preparation and printing of the *Building Code* was chaotic. The Government Printing Office was supplied on paper printing plates and printed on a small offset press such as an Addressograph Multilith 1250 model and 2650W with an automatic plate loader. The printing process was successful however the authors, with regularity, lost the track of the pagination of the *Code*, occasionally the authors would submit pages out of order e.g. a new page 36 would need to be inserted between pages 34 and 35 or immediately before page 38 with some of the text repeated. In one instance page 61 which is a right-hand page had inserted page 61A, 61B and 61C, printing was done 'back-to-back' and caused problems with collation. The hard working authors did not have the benefit of computers and were under pressure to produce the *Code* ASAP.

Following the demolition of the Government Printing Office, the site was used to provide temporary accommodation for Members and Assembly staff.

Additional material

Prior to the setting up of the Government Printing Office, the Legislative Council purchased a small offset press (Multilith 1250) for the purpose of printing the *Daily Hansard* and other Parliamentary documents, however the staff of the Council found the press difficult to use and returned to using a Roneo duplicator and later a Gestetner duplicator. Following the setting up of the Government Printing Office the Council pass the press and its problems became the property of the Printing Office. As the quality and consistency of the air-conditioning improved so did the quality of the print. Not all buildings were air-conditioned.

As more areas of government and business moved to offset printing Addressograph Multilith established a Darwin 'Bureau'. The Legislative Council again purchased another and more modern small offset press. The sole representative for *Addressograph* in Darwin insisted on training the operator. The representative was very obliging to the Council/Assembly and ensured that the press was operating and the operator had sufficient ink, rollers, chemicals, impression blankets and plates. During a sitting, the representative would visit the Council/Assembly to check if there were any problems. At this stage the Government Printing Office was not printing the *Daily Hansard* only the *Notice Paper*, *Question Paper* and *Minutes of Proceedings*.

The Commonwealth Government Printing Office in Canberra was convinced by Des Sydes that the need to establish a small offset unit was needed to produce Parliamentary material.

The planning and building of the new Parliament House incorporated within the building an area for small printery.

Prior to Cyclone Tracy, the NT University established its own printery. Following the cyclone the printery had to be re-established. The importance of its own printery to the University led to the purchase of quality equipment. The quality of the publishing was not the best in publications with a lot of pages as 'peaking' was a problem.

Union and relief staff – Relief staff from the Commonwealth Government Printing Office in Canberra were employed under a different agreement to the Darwin staff. An attempt by staff to be covered by the same agreement or similar was rejected, not by the Government Printer but by the ACT branch of the PKIU.

Overview

Mainly due to the advancement in technology it has become easier for the layman to produce documents without much skill. It sounds like 'sour grapes' but the layout, design and quality of documents are not of a high standard.

Index
No index entries found.