

Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Buildings and Structures Item CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PRESBYTERY, COOBER PEDY.						
Age 1967	Theme		Office				
Period 1946-1979	Subject PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION - PLACE OF WORSHIP - RESIDENCE		Region Far North				
Building Type Church Presbytery	Style VERNACULAR		Status N.E.R. N. Tr. (C1.)				
<u>Qualitative Data</u>			<u>Grading</u>				
Component		Comment	E	VG	AG	FP	NA
<u>History</u>							
1. Context:	Reputed to be the first underground church in Australia, first in South Australia.		*				
2. Person/Group:	Opened by Bishop Gallagher, Bishop of Port Pirie.				*		
3. Event:	Not established at this date.						*
<u>Architecture</u>							
4. Architect/Engineer/Builder:	Local voluntary labour.						*
5. Design:	Underground dug-out buildings, simple spaces, modest decoration, stone and concrete block entries, central nave with double transepts.				*		
6. Construction:	Unfinished dug-out construction, concrete floor, rubble stone entry and campanile. Concrete block entry to Presbytery.		*				
7. Interior:	Good example of hand excavated, simple dug-out finish, natural earth walls, concrete floor to all rooms.			*			
8. Representation:	Rare example of underground church. (One of two in Coober Pedy).		*				
<u>Environment</u>							
9. Continuity:	Important in establishing the dominant character of the Main Street.		*				
10. Local Character:	Establishes and maintains the dominant character of the town.		*				
11. Landmark:	A well-known and conspicuous landmark. Campanile is a dominant feature.		*				

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<u>Integrity</u>								
12. Alterations:	Dug-out remains unchanged from the original 1967 volume. Porch was added in 1969 and presbytery in 1980.			*				
13. Condition:	Building is in good condition. Some water penetration is evident in Presbytery.			*				
14. Compatibility:	Original use still intact.			*				
<u>Supplementary Information</u>								
Adaptation:	Within the context of a religious or public function the building has adaptation potential. The internal spatial qualities should be maintained along with the church entry and campanile. The residence is less important.							
Interpretation:	With public access the Church would lend itself to an active interpretation of an appropriate theme.							
Current Situation:	The buildings are owned by the Church and are under no known threat. There have been discussions about possible future extensions but nothing has been decided.							
Evaluated By	Lothar Brasse			Date				
Reviewed By	Ivar Nelsen			Date				
South Australian Heritage Committee Categorization				Date				

Historical Research: Coober Pedy Catholic Church and Presbytery

Opal was first discovered around Coober Pedy in February 1915 by Willie Hutchison who with his father and two other prospectors searched for gold near Lake Philipson. Soon after their discovery and under the name of New Colorado Syndicate, they pegged their first claim.

In 1916, the Government Geologist L. Keith Ward wrote that "The discovery of precious opal at Stuarts Range is the most important mineral discovery that has been made in South Australia for many years".

When the Transcontinental Railway was completed in 1917, many construction workers moved to the opal fields, followed by Broken Hill miners as a result of the bitter 1919 strikes. After the First World War many veterans - those unfortunate enough to be classed as displaced soldiers, drifted to the mines and it is generally believed that having lived in French trenches for months, life underground in opal field dugouts was introduced by them.

In June 1920 the Stuart Range Opal Field Progress Committee decided to name the opal field after the Aboriginal words "kupa piti" derived from the meaning "boys waterhole", "whiteman in a hole" or "whitefellow burrow".

The discovery of opal at nearby shallow depths in 1946 and the opening of new American markets saw a steady increase in population, which became an increasingly cosmopolitan one. Today Coober Pedy has a population of about 6,000 and with the Mintabi Opal Field produces over 90% of the world's opal.

From early photographs¹ it appears that a dugout existed on the Catholic Church site before 1953. On 10 August 1965 the same site - dugout site 73 - was transferred from Frank Pistek to the Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie Inc.

Father "Nick" was the first Catholic Priest to service Coober Pedy and Father Cresp the first resident Catholic Priest. The old dugout was enlarged by voluntary labour and opened on 25 June 1967 by the Most Rev. Bryan Gallagher DD.DPh., Bishop of Port Pirie.

The stone porch was begun in September 1969 and the presbytery in August 1970.

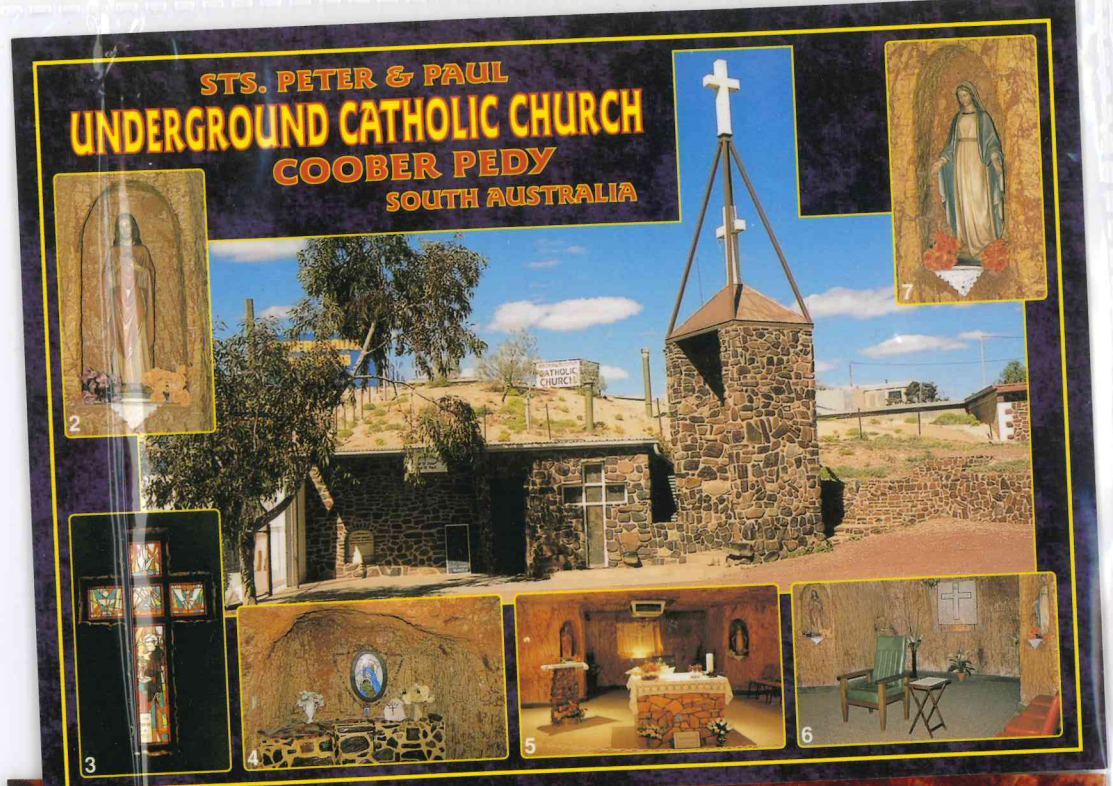
Lothar Brasse
HISTORICAL ARCHITECT (NE)
4.12.81

LB:SK

Sources:

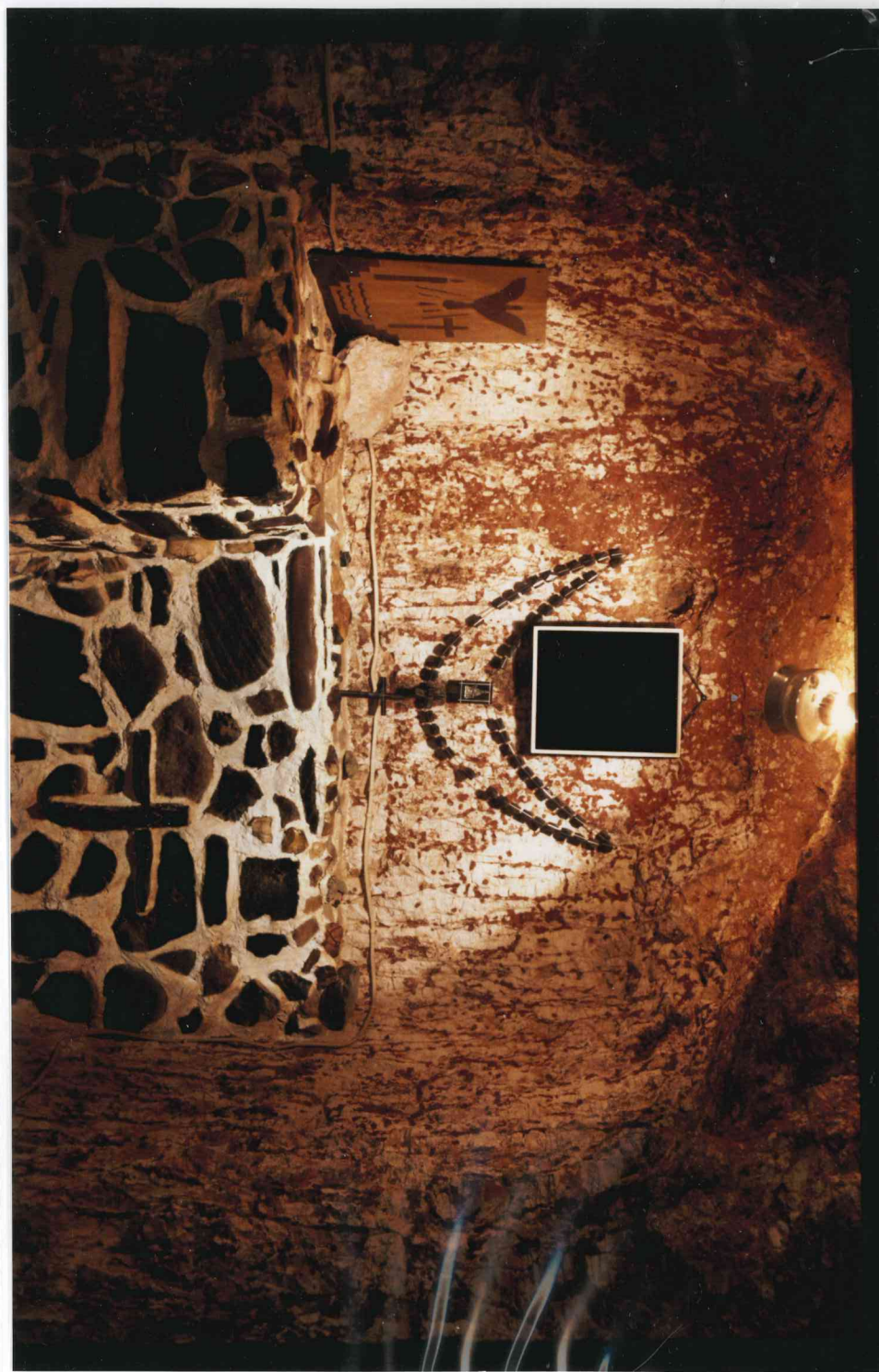
K.E. Medway Coober Pedy 65 years Young, 1915-1980 (1980)
Personal communication with local residents
Department of Lands records

(1) Medway pp.18



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UNDERGROUND CATHOLIC CHURCH
COOBER PEDY
South Australia

PC DO 106W

POSTCARD

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PLACE
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During the early 20th century people of the outback were served by priests on The Inland Mission. In the early 60's the Catholic Church in Coober Pedy began. Construction was slow work, digging by hand with jack picks, explosives, wheel barrows and hand winches, as well as lots of voluntary labour. On June 25th 1967 Bishop Gallagher officially opened the church dedicated to Sts. Peter and Paul on the 1900th Anniversary of their martyrdom.

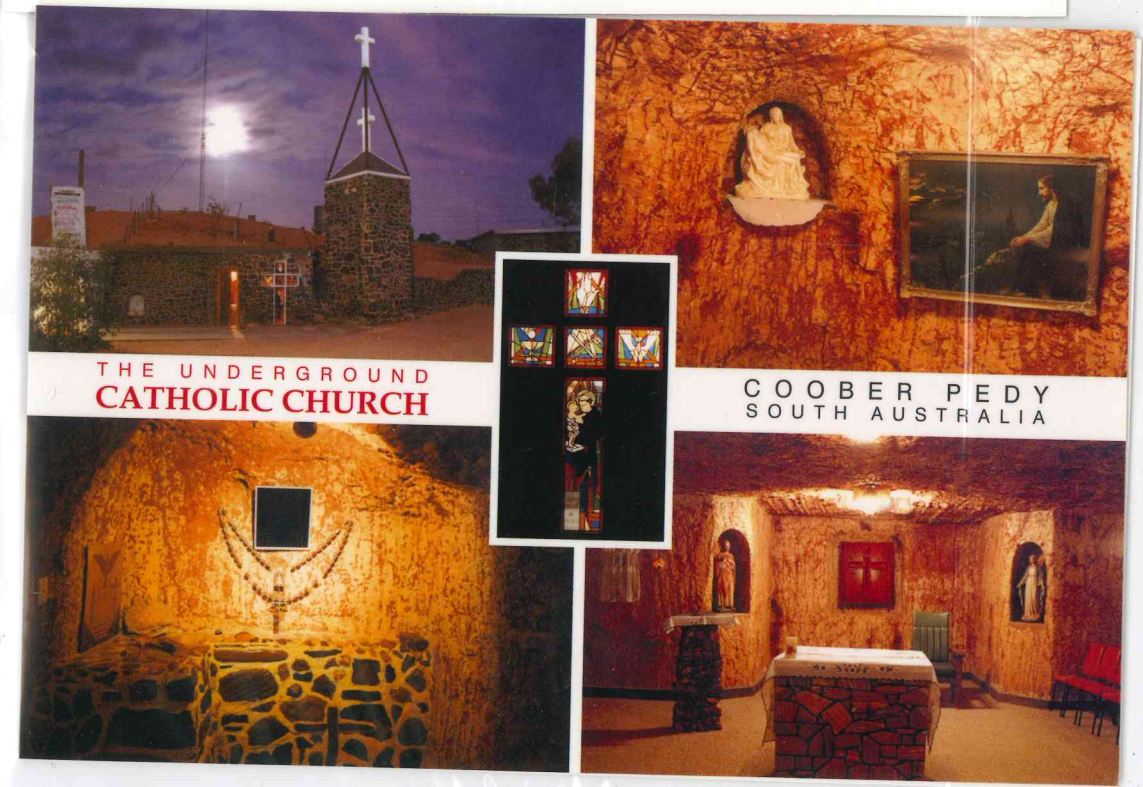
- Legend.
1. Catholic Church
 2. Sacred Heart of Jesus
 3. St. Anthony of Padua - Window
 4. Baptismal Font
 5. The Altar
 6. The Sanctuary
 7. Mary Immaculate

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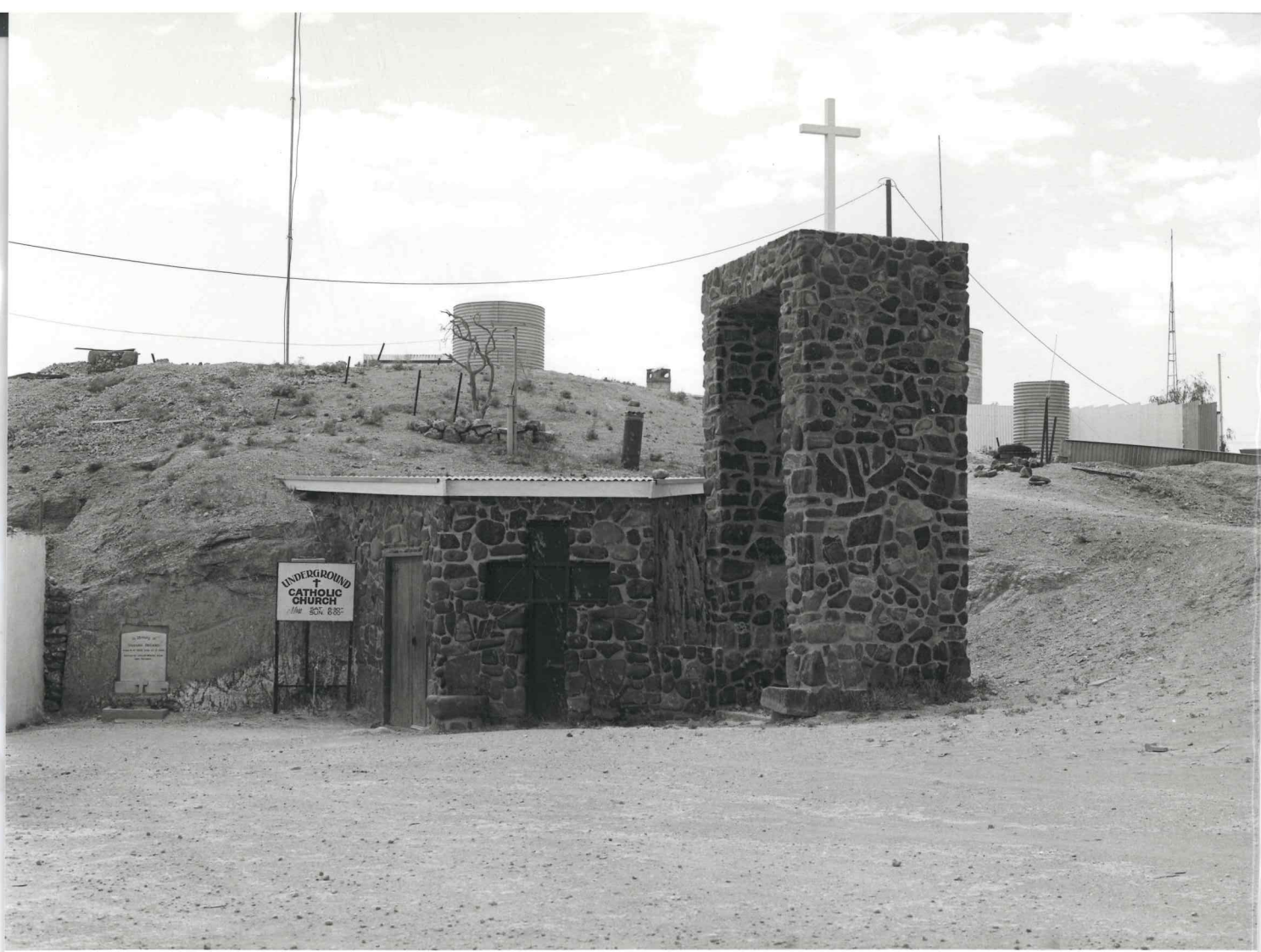
MADE IN AUSTRALIA



THE UNDERGROUND
CATHOLIC CHURCH

COOBER PEDY
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

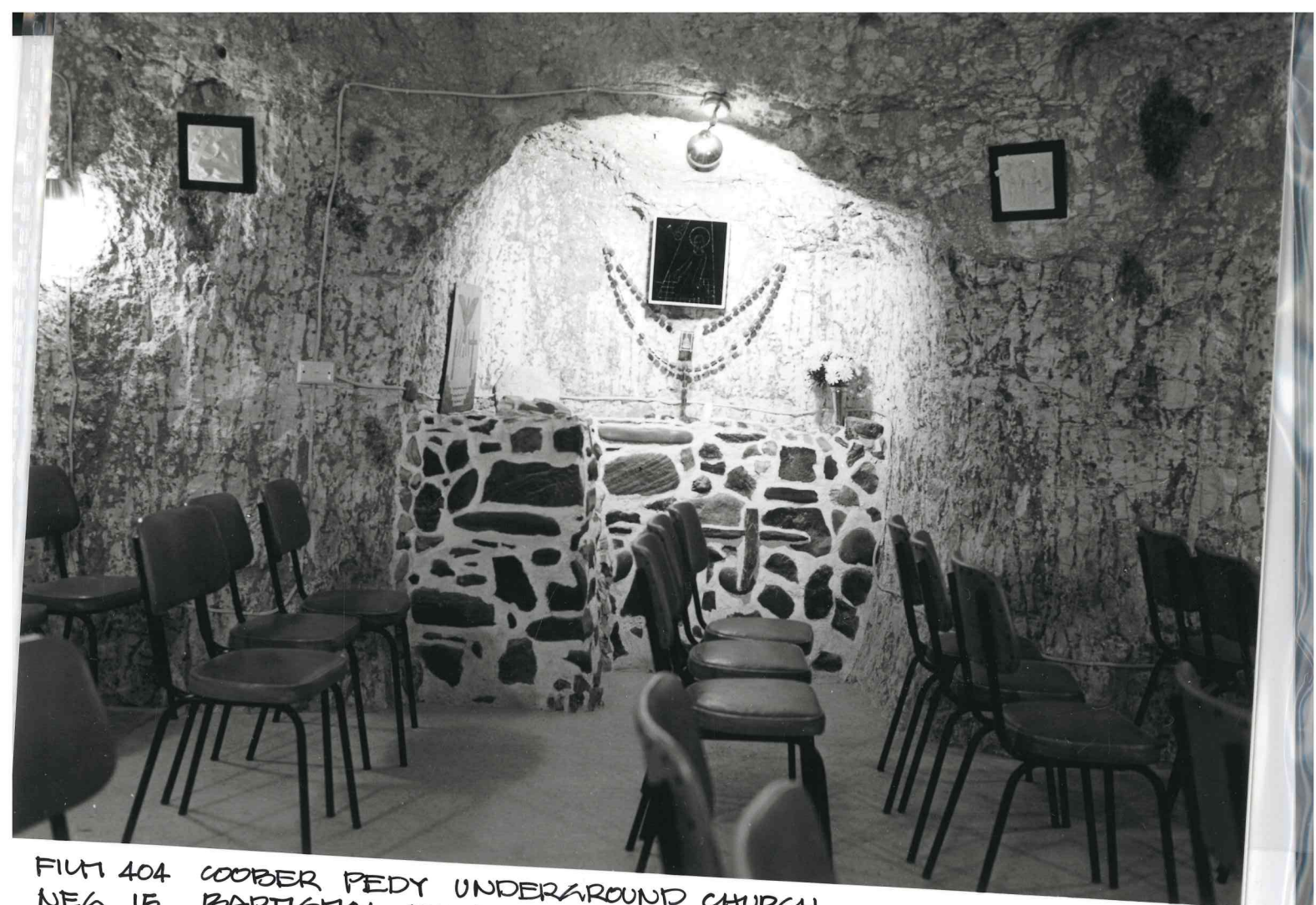
VTBOX



FILM 405
NEG 4

COOPER PEDY UNDERGROUND CHURCH
ENTR. PORCH & CAMPANILE

Lothar Nov. 1981



FILM 404 COOPER PEDY UNDERGROUND CHURCH
NEG 15 BAPTISMAL FONT

LOTHAR NOV 1981