

Cridlands MB - Happy 50th!

Cridlands MB celebrated its 50th anniversary at a special function at the Darwin Convention Centre on 6 February 2009, with 170 guests including its founding father, George Cridland.

Mr Cridland moved to Darwin from Queensland as a 24-year-old law student, to work as Associate to Justice Martin Kriewaldt in 1955. He completed his law degree and started his own firm in February 1959, which he called GW Cridland Barrister and Solicitor.

The 2008 Cridlands merger with local law firm Morgan Buckley to become Cridlands MB, has created the biggest commercial law firm in the Northern Territory.

George Roussos, a partner who has worked for Cridlands MB for more than 20 years, says the firm is proud of its longevity and service to Territorians over the past 50 years.

“We have been here a long time, we understand the environment, we know the people and that is a valuable attribute to have,” Mr Roussos said. “You can’t develop that overnight. You have to be around a long time to develop that store of knowledge and relationships.”

“It is invaluable to be able to get legal advice, in the context of our familiarity with the community, and our understanding of the unique development of the Northern Territory,” said Mr Roussos.

George Cridland, now 77 and working as a consultant for Cridlands MB, is proud but modest about the success of the firm.

“I hadn’t ever in my wildest dreams thought it would come to this,” Mr Cridland says. “It has been satisfying to see the firm grow and this recent merger



Charles Martel and George Cridland. Photograph: Christopher Knight.

has already given the firm added strength and direction.”

Cridlands MB History

Whether it was to answer the “call of the frontier” or discover the exotic mystery of the Northern Territory, George Cridland did both when he moved to Darwin in 1955.

Despite friends telling him he was committing “academic suicide” the 24-year-old Queensland law student moved to the frontier town to work as an associate to the now famous Justice Martin Kriewaldt.

Born in Winton, a rural town in

central Queensland, George was the eldest son of the postmaster Jeremiah Cridland and wife Annie. George was schooled at Beenleigh State School and then Nudgee College in Brisbane, before studying law at the University of Queensland.

Young George was drawn to law after encouragement from the headmaster at Beenleigh who was so impressed by his public speech in Year seven, that he remarked to George’s father that “he ought to be a barrister”.

George says, when he moved to Darwin, it had a population

of about 10,000 people, and the newest housing development was on the racecourse side of Ross Smith Avenue.

“None of the streets had been built yet, and the only way you knew where the streets were was by looking for fire hydrants and power poles because the roads were covered in six foot high spear grass,” George says.

“Ross Smith Avenue was a shocking piece of work, it had not been reconstructed since it was used as a wartime landing strip, and the vehicle tracks on either side wound their way through a series of magnificent pot holes.”

The northern suburbs consisted of half a dozen houses on the seafront in Nightcliff.

The Magistrates Court and Supreme Court consisted of two Sidney Williams huts, and another which housed the Court Offices just off the Esplanade. At that time in Darwin, there was only one judge, a magistrate, three private lawyers and four Crown lawyers.

“My job was more as a private secretary and in court, I would swear in witnesses and keep track of exhibits, which I had some difficulty doing in the afternoons when it was hot and proceedings were a bit drowsiness inducing,” Mr Cridland says.

One of the legal highlights during those long, hot and humid days, was the dramatic arrest of the ship, the Rose Pearl in Darwin Harbour in 1956, when the company Dalgetys claimed the ship’s owners owed money for repairs. Other cases included cattle doffing and the conviction of three brothers who were sentenced to six months’ gaol for using stockwhips to force Aboriginal stockmen to return to work.

George left Justice Kriewaldt and worked for six months for local lawyer Dick Ward. In 1958, he
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Fast Facts on Cridlands MB

Cridlands MB now has 62 staff including 27 lawyers, two law graduates and 33 support staff, and is considered the biggest commercial law firm in the Northern Territory, with offices in Alice Springs and Darwin.

The local firm is proud of its long service to the Northern Territory including 50 years’ of work by George Cridland and more than 20 years from nine of its senior lawyers and partners.

The company’s local knowledge is substantial, with five of its lawyers born or bred in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Cridlands MB specialises in many areas of law, including, commercial, corporate and property, litigation and dispute resolution, statutory compensation and insurance, employment, energy and resources and intellectual property.

Famous cases for Cridlands MB include the native title cases of Croker Island and Blue Mud Bay – two of the major matters involving native title to sea and river areas. Cridlands MB has also been involved in the recent case with the McArthur River diversion and BTEC litigation in the 1980s.

Prominent people who have worked at Cridlands MB over the past 50 years, include the Northern Territory’s Administrator Tom Pauling QC, the Master of the Northern Territory Supreme Court Terry Coulehan, Justice of the New South Wales Industrial Commission and Workers Compensation Commission Harry Bauer, prominent QC Graham Hiley, former Chief Minister Shane Stone, former Darwin Lord Mayor Cecil Black and Peter Barr QC of William Forster Chambers.

Cridlands MB contribute to the wider community through their membership and involvement with sporting clubs, community welfare and law associations, as well as the business community through the Chamber of Commerce, Resources Council and finance and insurance associations.



George Cridland at his graduation.

completed his law degree by studying externally at the University of Queensland, and was admitted to the Queensland Bar in Brisbane.

Returning to Darwin a fully fledged lawyer, George opened the doors of his law firm as GW Cridland Barrister Solicitor on 28 January 1959. His first office was above the local haberdashery store known as the Cashman's Building, which is now the Darwin Newsagency in the Smith Street Mall.

"The first case I had in February 1959 was a murder trial when an Aboriginal man was charged with murder, arising out of a knifing of another Aboriginal man in the course of a card game at the Bagot Reserve," George says.

"With only three one-man firms in town, we were run off our feet doing everything - conveyancing, civil and criminal matters."

George recalled defending five successful "driving under the influence" cases for clients at a time when there was no breath testing and inebriation had to be proven on "observable behavior".

George's firm soon attracted some big clients, including pastoralist Peter Sherwin (who was to form a long lasting relationship with the law firm that continues today), Mobil Oil, Mount Isa Mines, Carlton and United Breweries and Magellan Petroleum.

In 1963, Brisbane lawyer Alex Rorrison joined George as a partner, along with Harry Bauer, to create Cridland Bauer and Rorrison in 1964. The fledgling law firm had its offices on the first floor of the Burns Phillip building before moving to the Mitchell Chambers, which was part of the current Crowne Plaza site on Mitchell Street.

Alex Rorrison left to join Dick Ward's law firm, which had become Ward Keller, the firm's name then became Cridland and Bauer.

"Some accounting wit was heard to remark at that stage that there was a new dance in town called the Legal Jolly Miller - every time the music stops they change partners," Mr Cridland says.

Harry Bauer, who went on to become Justice of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission, left the company in 1969, and George continued as a sole proprietor with key members of his law firm - Cecil Black and Terry Coulehan - who went on to become partners in 1974.

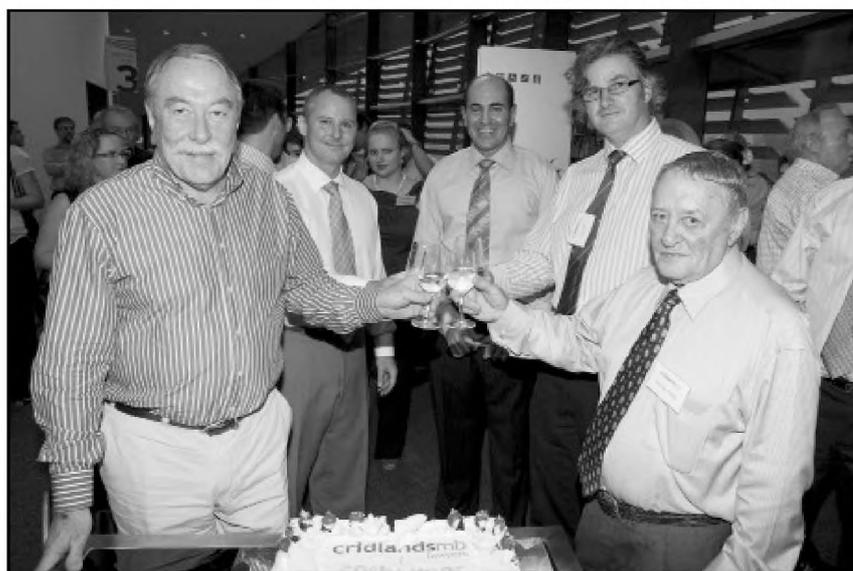
Cyclone Tracey hit in Christmas 1974. While the law firm's office

on the sixth floor of the City Mutual Building on Cavenagh Street was not badly damaged, the shocked Darwin community spent the next few years reeling from the devastation.

In the aftermath, the growing law firm focused on commercial law and conveyancing, motor vehicle cases and family law.

"After Cyclone Tracy there was a considerable boom in conveyancing, with a lot of people moving and selling up and insurance claims," Mr Cridland says.

In 1978, the law firm moved to its new offices at Kriewaldt Chambers



The Cridlands MB team now and then. Above: His Honour, the Administrator, Mr Tom Pauling QC, Cridlands MB Partners Tony Morgan, George Roussos and David Sweet and Cridlands MB consultant George Cridland toast the firm's success over the past 50 years. Photograph: Christopher Knight.

Below: A Cridland & Bauer office party.



in Searcy Street, before moving to the AMP Building in Smith Street in 1984, with Steve Karas, Gordon Berner, John George and Kim Graves also on board.

The firm celebrated its 25 years of practice early, along with other milestones, with a party styled as a “Multi Purpose Function” at the East Point gun turrets in 1983. The celebration was just shy of its 1984 milestone, but George Cridland remembered the “enormous knees up” lasted well into the early hours of the next morning.

The firm grew substantially in 1989, when it merged with local law firm Poveys, to create Cridlands. The firm then had 11 partners, including current partners Richard Giles and David Farquhar, and 25 lawyers.

Mr Cridland had been almost exclusively involved with the firm’s biggest pastoral client, Peter Sherwin, from 1976 and says the highlight of his career was helping float the Sherwin Pastoral Company in 1986.

While George retired from general practice as a lawyer in 1994, after 35 years, Cridlands continued to grow, until its most recent merger with local law firm Morgan Buckley in August 2008, to create Cridlands MB.

Originally Alice Springs-based, Morgan and Buckley began as a one man firm started by Graeme Buckley, who moved to the small town in 1982 seeking adventure. Graeme teamed up with local lawyer Tony Morgan to create



George Cridland cuts the cake at Cridlands MB’s birthday celebration. Photograph: Christopher Knight



The Mitchell Chambers

Morgan and Buckley, which merged with long standing Alice Springs law firm Martin and Partners in 2004.

Mr Buckley says the recent merger to form Cridlands MB has given Central Australians wider access to a large range of expertise in many different areas of law.

“There is a large amount of knowledge within our merged firms due to the length of time people have served here such as George Cridland’s 50 years and more than 30 years by Roger Bennett in Alice Springs,” Mr Buckley says. “We have a lot of senior lawyers with extensive legal expertise.”



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