

FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

Number 1 August 2010

Foundation, Opening, Consecration, Centenary Celebrations

Welcome to the inaugural edition of "From the Parish Archives". We hope that you will enjoy reading about the history of the Parish. This is especially so with the 150th anniversary in 2011. This version was slightly revised in September 2011.

It is intended the "From the Parish Archives" will be issued on a monthly basis and aims to be factual. However, any opinions expressed are personal and may not be necessarily shared by other parishioners.

Geoffrey A Sandy, Parish Archivist and Parish Historian.

Foundation

On Friday May 25 1860 a Public Meeting at the Fountain Hotel was called for the purpose of devising such means as may be expedient for the establishment of a Church of England in the Township of Little Eltham. The Hotel occupied a site opposite the present day Eltham Hotel.

The interesting fact here is that it was the laity of the area that took the initiative to build the church and then seek to have a Vicar appointed. In today's terms it was not a case of the Diocese "planting" a church in Little Eltham.

On August 6 1860 the Architect Nathaniel Billing was asked to make drawings and specifications for the new church and in February 1861 the bricks were ready and tenders called for the building of the Church. George Stebbing was the successful tenderer.

The Bishop Charles Perry and the architect Nathaniel Billing both accepted the invitation to the laying of the foundation stone. It was to be Easter Tuesday but the Bishop preferred Thursday 4 April 1861. Under the foundation stone is a bottle containing a message. More on that with a later issue.

Unfortunately no discernible mark or record has survived to indicate where the foundation stone is. This is despite numerous searches over the years.

Opening

On 12 December 1861 the church was opened and dedicated in the name of Saint Margaret, although it appears it is not clear whether this is Margaret of Antioch or Scotland.

Unfortunately, the Bishop could not come and no reason is given. The Hotel that had arranged lunch for the Lord Bishop and other dignitaries was most disappointed, although the lunch went ahead and the Church was billed for it.

Again unfortunately no record of the opening has been found. Apparently an account had been prepared and sent to "The Record", a Diocesan publication, but it was never published.

It is this date that represents our 150th Anniversary that we will celebrate in 2011.

Consecration

Before the opening of the Church a Church of England section of the Eltham cemetery had to be consecrated. Bishop Perry did so on the same day (4 April 1861) as the laying the foundation stone and promptly charged the Church two guineas (\$4.40) for his service.

The Church itself was consecrated by the Right Reverend Bishop Thornton of Ballarat on May 16 1876, after all debt had been removed.

Centenary

On Sunday 10 December 1961 the programme to celebrate 100 years since St Margret's opened started with a procession from the Eltham Post Office. Then there was a re-enactment of the inaugural meeting at the site of the former Fountain Hotel. A re-enactment of the laying of the foundation stone was undertaken outside the church. This was despite the fact that the exact location of the original was unknown.

A service of thanksgiving and dedication followed in the Church. After the service an old-fashioned Tea Meeting took place in the grounds of the Church. This was followed by a Festal Evensong at 7pm.

We look forward to our celebrations in 2011 –12 of 150 years of service to God in many districts that include Eltham, Research, Montmorency, St Helena and Panton Hill



This is the original church as envisaged by the Architect Nathaniel Billing. Note it is longer on the north wall than our current church. The north wall is temporary but has lasted nearly 150 years.