



**FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES**  
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**The Planning and Building of the Church 1860-61**

Welcome to the twelfth 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.

The "From the Parish Archives" aims to be factual. However, any opinions expressed are personal and may not be necessarily shared by other parishioners.

Geoffrey A Sandy

**Introduction**

One of the great treasures of our Parish Archives is the original Eltham Church of England Committee Minute Book 1860-1861. It records all the excitement and drama of the official meetings in those foundation years. It includes the planning and erection of a Church of England in Eltham. It begins with a request for all in the neighbourhood to attend a Public Meeting for this purpose and ends with a meeting held 19 December 1861, a week after the opening of the Church. This issue summarises the working and decisions of the Committee from 25 May 1860 to 19 December 1861 in regard to the planning and building of St Margaret's Church.

**Committee Establishment**

A Public Meeting to establish the Church was held at the Fountain Hotel on Friday 25 May 1860 at 7pm. Henry Dendy was unanimously called to the Chair. Among three resolutions passed was *that in the opinion of this meeting the establishment of a Church of England upon this township would tend to the morality and well-being of the district and social and spiritual welfare of its inhabitants*. Another resolution proposed the election of the following gentlemen as members of the Committee, Dendy, Huniford, Stooke, Pape, Wanen, Wingrove, Gardner, Hill, Armstrong, I Pierson and D Pierson. Alas no women are mentioned.

The Committee met on 1 June and was concerned with governance issues, including the quorum, standing orders, conflict of interest and divisions. Twelve rules were adopted. T Batt and C Hamilton were added to the

membership.

Like all Committees things sometimes don't run as smoothly as you desire. At the meeting held 30 August 1860 Charles Wingrove placed his resignation in the hands of the Committee. The reason he stated was *his attendance probably caused one or two other members of the Committee to absent themselves & he thought it was his duty to state this*. The Committee resolved unanimously to not accept his resignation. However, at the next meeting on the 10 September the resignation of W A Page was accepted. It was also agreed at the 4 September 1860 meeting that *a committee member who missed four consecutive meetings without giving good & sufficient reasons to the Secy. shall be considered to have resigned*.

### **The Planning of the Future Church**

Eltham Anglicans met for worship in the area before the opening of St Margaret's 12 December 1861. They met in what was referred to as a temporary church. This was also the place where the church committee met. On the 9 July it was agreed that the temporary church be lengthened ten feet and tenders were called for that purpose. On the 13 July the tender of £11 by Jarrold and Wall, one of the five tenders received, was accepted.

Earlier at the 2 June 1860 meeting the Committee agreed *that the block of land No. 21 – off Pitt...as offered by Mr Dendy be adopted for the site of the proposed church*. This of course is our present site. It was agreed that a site set aside by the colonial government was too remote from the centre of population. At the 6 August 1860 meeting Mr Beale moved *that Mr. Dendy be thanked for his kindness in giving the half acre for the Church*.

At that same meeting, the Committee resolved that *the Reverend Cooper Searle be suggested to see an Architect relative to the plans and specifications for the Church*. At the meeting of the 20 August 1860 the Secretary read a letter received from an Architect Nathaniel Billing and it was decided to request further clarification of the costs associated with the proposed building of the Church. It was the wish of the Committee that the total cost not exceed £500. However, we know from the Minute Book that the final cost was in excess of £1100. We also know that at the Committee meeting 28 August 1860 it was reported that Billing estimated the cost at £1200. He suggested, we assume as a way to reduce costs, to build an uncompleted Church. This is what we have today.

### **The Building Commences**

At the meeting 10 September 1860 a milestone in the building of the Church occurred. The tenders for making the bricks were opened. It was resolved to accept the tender of Thomas Harmer of £1/4/6 per thousand from the nine tenders received..

Meanwhile, it was reported at the 19 December 1860 meeting that the Lord Bishop's Council response to a request for a grant of money in aid of the erection of the Church required more information. Specifically, the cost of building and a block plan of the site. At the next meeting the Committee learnt

from the Diocesan Registrar that the Diocesan Architect and Bishop in Council had some objections. These are not discussed in the minutes. Better news was that unofficially £250 had been granted to Eltham by the Diocese. Thomas Batt was asked to ascertain if this was the case.

At the meeting 29 January 1861 funds for specific building purposes were allocated after a letter from the Architect Nathaniel Billing was read concerning *the partly coloured brickwork in the proposed Church*. They were agreed that:

- 20 shillings per day should be allowed for a man horse & dray for carting materials for the Church
- 30 shillings per day be the allowance for a team of bullocks
- 25 shillings per day be allowed for a double horse team
- 8 shillings per day be allowed for labourers

### **Tenders to Erect the Church**

At the 18 February 1861 meeting, the Secretary of the Committee read a Draft of the Specifications prepared by the building sub-committee and it was resolved to call for tenders to erect the Church in accordance with the Specifications. At the following meeting the six tenders received were opened. It was resolved to accept that of George Stebbings for £155, the lowest tender. The highest was Henry Hills of £382.

High drama then ensued at the meeting on 20 March 1861. George Stebbings, the successful tenderer was in attendance. He made a statement to the Committee *that he had taken his contract too low a price & if the Committee would allow him £20 he would go on with it*. The outcome was that the Committee refused to entertain the proposition. When Stebbings was told of their decision he said he should decline to execute his contract. But, worse it appears confidentiality of the other bids was now known to Stebbings and obviously all Committee members. The Committee contacted the other tenders as to whether they stood by them and also sought legal opinion.

G Rolfe & Co. the second lowest tenderer at £169 was contacted. They informed the Committee that unless alterations were made to the Specifications they were not willing to continue. However, at the 26 March 1861 meeting it was recorded that Stebbings would, after all, honour his bid of £155.

### **Erection of the Church**

At the 17 May 1861 meeting it resolved to request Billing to reduce his account. It was reported at the 3 June 1861 meeting he would not accede to that request. Meanwhile, at the 17 May 1861 meeting the Building committee was asked to obtain a window for the temporary end (north) of the new Church. They preferred a Gothic Head if it was not too expensive. Members were informed at the 3 June 1861 meeting that Ferguson and Urie would provide the window (our Altar Window) at the cost of £1.

At 12 July 1861 meeting the Committee resolved to inform the contractor

Stebbing's of its *disapprobation of the slow manner in which the stone work at the Church is being executed*. He assured the Committee everything was under control. Once the Church was erected tenders were called for roofing, slaters, plumbers and plasters, for joists and glazing and painting. We learn from the 15 November 1861 meeting that the cost of glazing the windows by Ferguson and Urie was £30. These are the windows that still exist today.

At last 12 December 1861 arrived and the Church, dedicated to Saint Margaret, was opened for divine service. We learn that a week later, for the first time, the Committee met in the new Church instead of the temporary church. Indeed, the latter had already been vacated.

### **Summary**

This issue has concentrated only on the archival record that is the Church Committee Minute Book 1860-1861. We have other documents that have been preserved from this period in our Parish Archives. Together they allow us great insights into the pivotal foundation years of our Church. As these are progressively more closely examined we will be able to prepare a comprehensive history of the early years in the life of our Parish, including the planning and erection of our Church.

### **Postscript**

We learn at the 9 October 1861 meeting that the Baptist Chapel of Melbourne offered St Margaret's the purchase of cedars seats (pews). At the 18 October 1861 meeting the offer was taken up and the seats purchased. They remained at St Margaret's until they were replaced in 1963 by the pews now in use.