



## FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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### Dixon Bertram Lay Reader

Welcome to the thirteenth 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 on 12 December 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

The third issue of our series was devoted to the first vicar of our Parish, Robert Mackie. The tenth issue featured four recent vicars. Prior to the appointment of Robert Mackie, the person who provided spiritual ministry and pastoral care to Eltham Anglicans was a Lay Reader named Dixon Bertram. This issue is devoted to him. It should be noted that some of our vicars served initially as Lay Readers but were eventually ordained. This was the case with our fourth vicar A J Pickering and the fifth vicar John Boyle Gason.

#### Lay Readers Role

A Lay Reader primarily conducted Divine Service but was unable to administer the sacraments. The Year Book of the Diocese of Melbourne 1879 describes the role of a Lay Helper after the listing of some names. It states that *The following Gentlemen are authorised by the Bishop to read the Morning and Evening Prayers, the Litany, and Sermons, to be approved by the Bishop, in the Archdeaconries, Rural Deaneries, Parishes, and Districts Specified, when requested so to do by the Archdeacon, Rural Deans, or Parochial Clergyman, by whom they were respectively nominated. It is not intended that a Lay Helper shall do more than read the Lessons at Services ordinarily conducted by a clerk in Holy Orders, except in cases of emergency.*

In practice such a person also offered pastoral care to parishioners and was usually a member of the church committee (vestry). This was the case for Dixon Bertram. It appears he also had some responsibility for the Eltham denominational school and the Sunday school.

#### Pastoral Issues

In a letter dated 15 November 1860, Thomas Downard, secretary of the Queenstown St Andrews church committee wrote to W B Andrew, secretary of the Eltham church

committee. He sought permission for Bertram to visit and minister in the area. He informs Eltham *that the people here being entirely without the means of Grace are desirous that the ministerial labours of Mr Bertram extend hither...* He adds that Queenstown will defray the expenses of Bertram's visit.

The Eltham committee responded on November 22 1860 agreeing to the request so long as Queenstown contribute £30 towards a horse for Bertram's use. However, Downard in a letter dated 8 December states, that Queenstown will only pay £15 for the horse. Apparently on December 19 Eltham agreed to that lower contribution.

However, just over 3 months later at the Eltham committee meeting 26 March 1861, Bertram was informed that it was its wish that *he devote his time to this district solely*. Greensborough was part of the district but Queenstown (St Andrews) was not.

Dixon Bertram reported to the Eltham Church of England Committee at its 29 January 1861 meeting that he had, in accordance with the wishes of the committee, gone to Greensborough to hold a week day service. This was not well received at Greensborough and he was informed that it was part of the Rev. Lynars district not his. He checked with the Lord Bishop and was informed Greensborough was part of his district. The Bishop insisted a service was to be held there on the first opportunity. We trust the Lord Bishop also informed Greensborough before Bertram arrived to take the service.

### **Accommodation and Stipend**

The new church at Eltham had to secure suitable accommodation and an appropriate stipend for the newly appointed Lay Reader. Accommodation, for Bertram, was first in a rented cottage owned by Thomas Hunniford. Later he was accommodated in a rented cottage owned by George Stebbings. Rent was £13 per annum for Hunniford's cottage and £15/12/- per annum for Stebbing's cottage. The latter was probably the same cottage offered to Robert Mackie that in the end caused friction between Mackie, Stebbings and members of the church committee.

Apparently the Lay Readers stipend was an issue for the Eltham church. In a letter dated 16 September 1861 Bertram wrote to the chairman (Henry Dendy) and the members of the Church of England committee. He had heard that the committee was to increase his stipend. He was at pains to point out that *he has not complained*. He mentions later that *great misrepresentations have occurred*. However, he does remind the committee that before his appointment he was told that the stipend would be between £150 and £200 per annum with a cottage, and when he arrived at Eltham, he was informed it would be £150 and no more.

At the 18 October 1861 meeting of the Committee the secretary was instructed to inform the Lord Bishop that the committee could guarantee £100 in subscriptions to the Lay Reader's stipend. The Bishop had asked for such a guarantee.

It is interesting that as he was about to leave Eltham, in a letter dated 10 January 1863 to the Trustees of the Church of England, Bertram congratulates the Finance committee that they have met the promised stipend. He remarks *that they have not allowed as in other places for it to be in arrears*.

Over the term of his appointment the Lay Reader's stipend was mainly raised by subscription and collections from parishioners. This means that approximately £100 per annum would have had to be raised. We know from the subscription lists that the highest contributors were Henry Dendy and son, Henry Snooke, D G Clark, W B Andrews, Major Anthony Beale and Charles Mash Maplestone. The latter two were

associated principally with St Katherine's, St Helena.

We know for at least three years the Diocese made a contribution towards the stipend. The Diocesan Registrar informed Eltham (21 May 1861) of a grant of £50 towards the Lay Readers stipend but this was later reduced. Again, on 7 February 1862 the Diocesan Registrar informed the church secretary W B Andrew of an allocation of £50 for the Lay readers stipend. This was followed by a letter dated 2 May 1862 of the explicit arrangements for payment. In his last year of service (1863) the Archdeaconry of Melbourne gave to the parochial district of Eltham, Greensborough and St Helena a grant of £56/5/- towards the Lay Reader.

### **Service Recognition**

The Church of England Record for the Diocese of Melbourne 21 November 1860 discussing a Tea Meeting held to raise funds for the proposed Eltham church mentions *Mr. Bertram, the lay reader, recently appointed for Eltham proposed a vote of thanks to the Ladies, the Choir and the Committee*. In January 1861 Bertram's name is listed for the first time as a member of the Church Committee. His membership continues until he leaves in June 1863. We are unsure what ministerial arrangements existed between his departure and the arrival of the first vicar Robert Mackie 1 June 1864.

The Record 1 May 1861 reports that at the laying of the foundation stone on the 4 April 1861, *Mr Bertram, the Lay reader, in addressing the meeting, trusted that the words of the Rev Cooper Searle, of the importance of individual actions, would reach the hearts of many churchmen; although much had been done, a great deal still remained to do before the important work would be accomplished*. The Record indicates that *Mr. Bertram proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee, to the ladies who had kindly provided tables, and to the Choir, for their assistance towards the evening's enjoyment*.

Bertram also wrote an account of the opening of the church on 12 December 1861. However, he was advised in a letter 11 January 1861 from an unnamed correspondent, that The Record had not published his account.

Dixon Bertram had some responsibility for the denominational school. For instance, at the Tuesday 29 January 1861 committee meeting, Bertram reported that he had received a resignation of a Dr Short a Master of the Denominational school and he had forwarded this to the Dean. He suggested the committee take the opportunity to appoint to the vacant Trustee's position. They declined although no reasons are given.

Also, on 16 September 1861 Bertram writes to Henry Dendy concerning the election of a school teacher to replace a Mr Rogers who apparently had been removed. He assures the committee he will get Trustees appointed so for *the election of a teacher and that it should not rest solely with the Manager of the school*. Apparently there were problems with the school. This was confirmed by an Official Report of the Education Authority dated 17 September 1861 of the school that was not complimentary.

Dixon Bertram probably had some responsibility for the Sunday school. He is co-signatory of a financial statement and a list of assets, dated 1 July 1862, for the Sunday school.

### **Farewell to Eltham**

On the 10 January 1863 Dixon Bertram wrote to the Trustees expressing appreciation for the assistance given to him whilst at Eltham. He states that *he is praying earnestly that God will bless the work in your hands and increase and establish his church in this parish.*

On the 25 June 1863 Bertram wrote to the Finance Committee with thanks for their testimonial address presented following his resignation as Lay Reader at Eltham. He thanks them for their comments on how well he has carried out his ministry, their expressions of regret of his resignation and their good wishes to him for the future.

The Church Gazette for The Diocese of Melbourne No. 35, Vol. 16 1863 p.133 records this testimonial to Bertram as he is about to leave the colony of Victoria. It is described as *a testimonial, expressive of esteem and good wishes has been presented by the trustees and finance committee to D Bertram Esq. Church reader at Eltham on the occasion of his leaving for Moore College Sydney; to which Mr Bertram made a suitable and affectionate reply.*

As a final act Bertram, in a letter dated 29 June 1863, informs the Eltham committee that Caroline Emmeline Bertram shall in the meantime act on his behalf in regard to any monies owing to him. We do not know if this was his wife or some other relative.

### **Summary**

Dixon Bertram, although a Lay Person, may be considered as the first minister of the Eltham church. His service was not only in the conduct of Divine Service and in providing pastoral care, but he was active in church committees and other church events, including the denominational school and the Sunday school. We owe a great debt to this forebear in Christ.