



FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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Denominational School and Parish Library

Welcome to the seventeenth edition of "From the Parish Archives". We hope that you will enjoy reading about the history of the Parish. This is especially so with us in our 150th year.

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

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Introduction

If there is a theme to this issue it is education within a Christian context. It examines our Denominational School and the Parochial and Sunday School Library we operated in our first three decades.

Denominational School

Our School was the first established in Little Eltham. It was a Church of England School and was opened on the 15 August 1853 with 26 pupils. It was located west of Diamond Creek, in Swan Street. When the Government started numbering school in 1863 it was given number 371. The land was gifted by Josiah Holloway. Josiah was a former shoemaker from England. In 1850 he purchased from the government one square mile for a £ per acre. He called it Little Eltham. The Eltham Primary School was opened in 1856 but it received a lower number 209. It was (is) situated east of Diamond Creek in Dalton Street.

In May 1856, the District Inspector described our school as being of horizontal slabs with a shingle roof, floored, containing school furniture, of fair condition, but on an inconvenient site on the west side of the creek. Although the centre of Eltham was south of Pitt Street, west of the creek was not as favourable as east of the creek. Saint Margaret's church was once in the centre of Eltham. Today the centre has moved north, due to the location of the railway station and the post office. The Inspector goes on to say that the teacher was female and seems of good character. Indeed, we trust she was just that. Later a three roomed dwelling of slabs and shingles was erected for the teacher. In 1871

the school had an enrolment of 67 and an average attendance of 44.

The governing body of the school were the trustees. After Dixon Bertram was appointed Lay Reader he, and the ordained clergy that followed, had a special interest in, and responsibility for, the School.

We have some understanding of the educational performance of the School, from the report from the inspectoral visit by HA Sassel, on 21 March 1861. In fact we have two versions of the same report in the parish archives. One dated 20 May and the other dated 17 September. It is a damning report. There are eight categories reported on. First, buildings. These are described as "bad". Second, apparatus, which is insufficient and there is a great need for books. Third, organisation. It is described as well as can be expected given the state of the buildings and the want for books. Fourth, instruction. The inspector states that the school was very much neglected by the previous teacher. He comments that at present the instruction is very elementary and does not reach the Boards Programme.

Fifth, discipline. The inspector quotes Dixon Bertram that discipline is much better. Mr Sassel states it should improve more. Sixth, methods. These are described as "mixed". Seventh, teachers. The inspector frankly states that Mr Rogers is not competent to teach children above the age of eight. Finally, is a category called "special". Mr Sassel comments on the roll, care should be taken that the Christian names are correctly spelled.

We trust that our school improved its performance significantly over the next 10 years. Our School operated until 1872 when government grants to non-government, essentially church schools, ceased. This was a response to the passing of an Act of Parliament that was to providing free, compulsory and secular education throughout the colony of Victoria. The Church of England opposed the Act as did the other major denominations. Unlike the Roman Catholics who retained their primary school system the Church of England largely withdrew from the area, except for a few select schools.

At the 1 March 1876 meeting of the church committee, the Revd. AJ Pickering stated that he had requested Mr Briggs the remaining trustee of the school and grounds to be in attendance. His advice was sought as to what to do with the "Old Wooden School House". He believed it could be sold or removed. He thought it would cost more to move it than what it is worth. The committee decided to put out for tender for its removal. Only one tender was received and that from the long-time secretary of the church committee WB Andrew for £10. His tender was accepted but he immediately returned the £10 back to the church treasurer.

Parochial and Sunday School Library

At the 25 March 1877 church committee meeting, the secretary informed members of an offer by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to supply books at half the catalogue price with no charge for transport to Melbourne from London. The purpose as to establish a parochial and Sunday school library. The committee accepted the offer.

Monies were collected and sent to The Society. Mrs Mary Jane Hill was especially thanked for her efforts. The secretary reported that 100 volumes had been ordered for the parochial library and 49 volumes for the Sunday school.

On the 18 April 1877, with the imminent arrival of the books from England, it appears that the committee realised it had no suitable place to house them. It was proposed that a library building be erected attached to the northeast section of the church. This was where the vestry was to be according to the original Billing's design of the church.

With the Bishops approval obtained, the committee wasted no time in calling for tenders. Two tenders were received but the committee believed they were too high. Andrew was asked to make an estimate of costs and then at the 30 May 1877 meeting he was authorised to procure all the necessary materials. The committee had decided to erect the library themselves. By 29 August the work was completed.

The books ordered from The Society had arrived. The rules relating to their borrowing and use were pasted in each volume. The library was to serve the two centres of Eltham and Saint Helena. It was agreed two-thirds of the volumes were kept at Eltham and the remainder at Saint Helena. Mr B Lowman was appointed "head" librarian, Mr B Wallis assistant librarian at Eltham and Mr Francis Flintoff assistant librarian at Saint Helena.

Over the next two years of operation there were some issues relating to the 250 volume library. One minor issue was complaints by subscribers that some of the books were too small. A more serious complaint was that all was not well with the staffing team. The head librarian complains that he has had little help from the assistant librarian over the last 6 months. The vestry, the church committee now goes under this modern title by now, requests the head librarian to ask the assistant if he wishes to continue in the role. The minutes of the meeting do not record an answer.

Another issue relating to the library surfaced with the newly appointed Reader John Boyle Gason. He was latter ordained and was our fifth Vicar. He mentioned that a number of the books in the library were unsuitable for Sunday reading. We are left to speculate on the meaning of this. It may be that Gason was allowing his own preferences to influence his judgement. He suggested a better type of book be purchased like the works of Scott. Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish historical novelist, playwright and poet, popular throughout the world. Some of his works are regarded today as classics or near-classics, like *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, *The Lady of the Lake*, *Waverly*, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*.

Subsequently, at the 1 November 1880 vestry meeting, unanimous approval was given for the purchase of new books, presumably suitable for Sunday reading. These included works from authors like, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, James Fenmore Cooper, Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, Nathaniel

Hawthorne, Jane Austen, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Authors with a Scottish association dominate the recommended books.

Postscript

It is unlikely that Saint Margaret's would ever enter into the school sector again. However, over the decades the Eltham clergy and laypersons have participated in religious instruction in the local schools. Over the decades there have been many incarnations of a church library although not quite of the scale of the one that operated in the 1870s and 1880's. The present incarnation, 2011, operates from Dendy House.

As to the extension northwards of our church for vestry and other purposes, this was always the intention of our founders. This is the plan for the future extension for worship space and provision of alternative space for vestry and sacristy.