



FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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The Parsonage

Welcome to the eighteenth 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.

Geoffrey A Sandy, Parish Archivist and Parish Historian.

Introduction

The Parsonage, or as it is better known today as "Dendy House", was completed in 1870. The author incorrectly stated the date was 1873 in the 2011 publication of Saint Margret's Anglican Church Eltham: Celebrating 150 Years. It served as a residence for the vicar and his family until 1958 when the Vicarage, fronting John Street, was built. The last priest and his family to live there was the Reverend David Warner. The author is unaware when it first started to be referred to as Dendy House. Henry Dendy was of course a leading layperson in the late 1850s and the 1860s. He donated the land on which the Parsonage stands. Today, it houses the offices of clergy, the parish office and parish archives.

Heritage Listed

Heritage Victoria describes the Parsonage as *a simple four roomed dwelling with twin parallel gables. There are projecting brick quoins at each corner with manganese brick headers emphasising the corner of each quoin. There is a simple entrance porch constructed of lattice with arched entrance. The roof is corrugated iron.* Again, Heritage Victoria describes the Parsonage as *Style Victorian. Design standard four room house. Plan rectangular. Walls solid brick face. Roof gabled, with eaves, slate clad. Features are the façade with its two gables, the central lattice porch, face brick walls, simple design, chimneys and the very largely intact interior.*

The Decision

A public meeting was held at the Fountain Hotel 19 December 1868. It was

resolved that it was desirable to erect a parsonage. It was also resolved to form a committee to be called, Christ Church Parsonage Building Committee, to carry out this object. This practice of referring to Christ Church began in the mid-1860s and lasted until 1871. The Eltham church was always officially Saint Margaret's, but not always Margaret of Scotland. The parsonage building committee also resolved that subscription lists for the building be opened and collectors appointed for a designated area. The circumstances surrounding the decision to build a parsonage and its associated processes are very similar to that of building the church in 1860.

Construction of the Parsonage

In December 1868 it was decided to open a waterhole behind the church and commence excavation for the foundations. In January 1869 tenders were called for the making of 40000 bricks. H Spicer won the tender and during February and March 1869 the burning of the bricks took place.

In April the committee believed the tenders received for carting the stone were too high so fresh tenders were called, and John Hill was successful. Tenders were also called for the masonry and bricklaying work and Mr Friars was successful. In May the committee authorised that Mr Greenwood be employed to quarry the remaining stone for the foundations, that the window frames be purchased and payments to a number of contractors be made. In July John Sweeney was the successful tenderer to cart the bricks to the site of the parsonage. By August this had been achieved and the walls erected.

Tenders were now called for the roofing but the committee only received one response. However, Marland and company was awarded the tender. By October 1869 the Architect could report that the timber for the roof had been undertaken in accordance with the specifications. The secretary of the committee was requested to ask the Diocesan authorities if Church Building Regulations allowed the use of iron instead of slate. The response was in the affirmative. The original roof of Dendy House was iron but much later replaced by tin. The roof of the church is slate.

In March 1870 the timber for the flooring was ordered and Marland and company were authorised to lay the floor, additional work on the roof and fascia board and for painting. The committee was so impressed with the work that unanimously voted thanks to the contractor.

Fitting-Out of the Parsonage

By June 1870 the building of the parsonage was well advanced so work could now begin on the interior. At the 13 June meeting the secretary, William B Andrew, was instructed to call for tenders for the joiners work. At the same time tenders were called for spouting, a picket fence in front of the parsonage and a paling fence at the back. No tenders were received for the joiners or fencing work. WB Andrew indicated a willingness to undertake the work himself and the committee accepted the offer. Andrew was also asked to prepare the specifications for the plastering and calling for tenders for that work. The successful tenderer was George Stebbing, the local man who built the church.

By September 1870 the plastering work was completed as was the joinery and fence work. At the 12 September committee meeting it was decided to paint the inside of the parsonage with only one coat so the Reverend Andrew Brown could move in as soon as possible. At last the happy milestone of completion had been reached.

Alas, this did not eventuate. At the 26 September meeting it was reported that one coat had been applied but the Reverend Brown informed the committee he could not occupy the house until provision was made for a Water Closet. It appears the committee had overlooked the necessary provision of toilet facilities. The secretary was, no doubt, happy to report on the 19 October 1870 that the Water Closet had been erected and presumably the Reverend Brown now occupied the parsonage. However, the Minute Book does not explicitly state this.

Project Issues

In undertaking any project, like building a church or parsonage, there will inevitably be some problems along the way. Three common problems of any project are:

- Personnel problems of the project team
- Securing sufficient resources, principally money
- Failing to complete the project on time

The parsonage project was not immune from these problems. First, there is some circumstantial evidence of the existence of tensions and conflicts between members of the committee. In March 1869 WA Page and Mr Wallis resigned. The latter refused to give a reason for doing so. We are not told why Page resigned. Then in June 1869 the secretary, Alfred Armstrong, resigned and was replaced by WB Andrew. This same thing had happened in 1860 as well. However, our judgement is that the committee did operate effectively, notwithstanding some personnel problems.

During the construction and fitting-Out of the parsonage monies to pay the contractors was very tight. Not enough was raised through subscription to the Parsonage Building Fund. The committee did take out an overdraft of £20 with the Bank of Australasia. There was some support from the Diocese, for instance, a grant of £50 in July 1869. However, it was difficult to pay contractors on time. Worse it appears the committee allowed a moiety of £100 lapse because it was not expended by 1 April 1870. It is difficult to judge if this lapse was incompetence but it was a “blow” to the committee. There was an instance where a contractor refused to undertake further work until he had been paid for work previously undertaken.

It is difficult to judge from this difference in time whether the building of the parsonage was “on-time”. There is no evidence yet of any completion date being set. However, if we view the decision to build the parsonage as the starting point of this project and the occupancy of the parsonage by the vicar and his family as the end point, then the project took 24 months. Those expert in building standards in 1870 can judge if this constitutes “project overrun” of

not.

Postscript

We are privileged to have such an important streetscape consisting of our Heritage Church and Parsonage, together with a number of significant trees. This is not only important to Eltham but also Victoria and nationally. There is much work that is required to ensure the heritage value of our parsonage is maintained, and at the same time, ensure all the buildings serve the present-day and future ministry and mission of the church. It is also an honour that the gardens of the west and south side of the parsonage hold the remains of the dearly departed of Saint Margaret's and Saint Faith's.

May light perpetual shine on them.

[insert image here]

Caption underneath:

The Parsonage circa early 20th C