



## FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES Number 21 April 2012

### Saint Margaret's During the Great European War

Welcome to the twenty-first 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

This issue examines the parish life of Saint Margaret's during the war period 1914-1918, now known as World War 1. It focuses on the vicar during most of this period the Reverend Thomas Henry Sapsford. The historical record suggests he was one of the parish's finest vicars. He was a person who was much loved by his parishioners and very well-regarded by the wider community. This topic has been chosen for this April issue because of ANZAC Day.

#### The Reverend Sapsford

The Reverend Thomas Henry Sapsford was vicar of Saint Margaret's from 1915 to 1922, so he was in Eltham for most of the Great European War. He was inducted into the Parish on the 2 July 1915. He did much to uphold and support parishioners and those of the wider community. In an apparent reference to the war raging in Europe in late 1915, Sapsford said *whilst doing good for those abroad, we would do well to think of those at our doors and cheer the hearts of orphans*. He and a group of ladies of the church arranged a Christmas tree and entertainment for the children at the Sutherland Homes. In order to assist the Revd. Sapsford to minister during these difficult times, the parishioners at the close of a watch-night service on New Year 1917 presented him with £16. The money was to be used for a "parson's horse". It was a token of their appreciation of his labours for the last 6 months. The Parish in both 1917 and 1918 operated a surplus budget. Receipts for 1917 was £155/12/- with £93/9/9 offertory and £35/3/6 donations. Receipts for 1918 were £179/9/7 with £96/17 offertory and £35/9/6 donations. A donation to the French Red Cross of £3 in 1918 is the only identifiable expenditure towards the war effort.

#### Parish Life

Despite the war raging in Europe the Parish continued in its life of worship and ministry. On Friday the 26 November 1915 the rite of confirmation was administered to almost 40 candidates at Saint Margaret's. The Right Reverend Dr Green, late

Bishop of Ballarat, performed the ceremony assisted by the vicar the Revd. Sapsford. On Saturday 6 May 1916, a sale of gifts was held in Saint Margaret's schoolroom. Mrs Green, the wife of Bishop Green, who was received by the vicar and an honour guard of scouts declared the sale open.

On Sunday the 29 October 1916, at a large congregation at Saint Margaret's, the Vicar preached an impressive sermon on the duty of attending public worship. This was at the time when passions were running high on the issue of conscription for service overseas. We are told that a pleasing feature of the service was a splendid solo by Mr Darbyshire, the well-known vocalist and successful competitor at the South-street competitions. It was reported his magnificent voice was heard to great advantage in the church.

On Sunday 22 July 1917, the parish held its patronal festival. It was reported that special music was rendered by the choir to a large congregation. This date suggests that during these years Margaret of Antioch was considered as patron saint of the parish as her feast day is July 20.

### **The Scouts Concert of 1917**

The Revd. Sapsford was not only Vicar of Saint Margaret's but the Eltham scoutmaster. The concert on the 27 June 1917 at the local hall opened with the National Anthem and the Marsellaise. This was followed by "Here we are again". Later was sung another chorus "The Kaiser and Belgium". Then a returned soldier TF Clayton gave two musical items. Many other musical acts followed and Miss Beale, from St Helena, apparently gave a splendid pianoforte. The concert proceeds were divided between the Scouts funds and the Honour Board Fund of Saint Margaret's church. In late July 1917, the Revd. Sapsford was already working on an honour board for those associated with Saint Margaret's who served in WW1. The resulting Honour Board hangs on the south wall of the present church.

### **The Honour Board**

On the back wall (south) of our Church is an Honour Board of those men (no women are listed) connected with St Margaret's who served in the Great European War 1914 to 1918. This is the project that Sapsford worked so hard to achieve. There are 74 names inscribed on the Honour Board. A red cross before each of 13 names indicate they died in the conflict. It is likely that the Honour Board was made by James Moore and Sons Pty Ltd of City Road South Melbourne. This firm wrote to the Revd. Sapsford with an estimate of the Honour Board. It mentions holding 30-40 names and made of maple or blackwood and polished. Each letter to cost 1/9 each.

Nearby on the east wall is a separate memorial to George Alfred Williams who is one of those with a red cross before his name. George Alfred Williams held the rank of Corporal in the Australian Army Medical Corps. He died 17 September 1918 aged 21. He was the son of W A and Mary Ann Williams of "Belle Vue" Eltham. He is buried at Hancourt British Cemetery in the Somme region of France. Hancourt was captured by the Australian Corps in the middle of September 1918. It is likely George was a casualty of that battle. The British Cemetery was constructed by Australian units in September 1918 and these original graves are in Row B, C, and D.

### **The Conscription Referendum**

In late October 1916, the Federal Government put a referendum to the Australian electorate. It read: *Are you in favour of the Government having, in this grave emergency, the same compulsory powers over citizens in regard to requiring their military service, for the term of this War, outside the Commonwealth, as it now has in regard to military service within the Commonwealth?* In other words, are you in

favour of conscripting young men to serve in the war overseas?

It is a matter of history that the referendum was lost narrowly. The Evelyn Observer states that *in Eltham the day went off quietly and the women voted almost to the man*. We know why the day went off quietly because all the hotels were closed. We are also told *nothing occurred on Saturday to cause anything unpleasant*. We do not know the views of the Revd. Sapsford or the parishioners of the day concerning the issue of conscription for overseas service. However, The Advertiser presumes to know as it states that *in a recent letter from the old country states that a new name for objectors, shirkers or otherwise, is an "Object". Seems fairly appropriate, and fortunately applies to few in our locality*. We know that the Church of England clergy throughout Australia almost unanimously and with great passion advised its adherents to vote "yes" in the referendum. This was highly likely in Eltham. And yet, certainly some adherents of the Church of England throughout Australia must have disregarded that advice, as the referendum was defeated.

### **The End of WW1**

Often during difficult times people "turn to the church". It would appear that this is what occurred at Saint Margaret's during Holy Week in 1918. The Advertiser reports that as the war drew to a close, over 800 persons attended Divine Worship and on Good Friday Stainer's Crucifixion was beautifully rendered by St Mark's choir from Fitzroy. It is also reported that the Revd. Sapsford conducted a unique service in the open air on Sunday on the site of the proposed church school at Montmorency.

On the 11 November 1918 the Great European War was ended with the signing of the armistice. Saint Margaret's celebrated with the ringing of its bell. It was rung until its rope broke. About 60 people attended a thanksgiving service on 17 November conducted by the Vicar. The order of service was the National Anthem, Doxology, Te Deum, Thanksgiving Prayers, "God bless our splendid men" and the Benediction. The text used for Sapsford's preaching was Psalm 113 verse 1 *Praise the Lord, Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord*.

### **The Coming Home Committee**

Throughout the war years, the Revd. Sapsford was chairman of the Coming Home Committee for the Eltham District. Actually the Committee operated during the war and we have its minutes from the middle of 1917. Of interest is that women were active on the committee. Miss Wingrove and Miss Maplestone, both staunch parishioners of the Parochial District of Eltham, Saint Helena and Diamond Creek are two examples.

During the war it appears that a common practice was to present a wallet to those men who had enlisted. For example Corporeal R Sims was presented with such and Mr Parsons accepted a wallet on behalf of his son. For those who were killed in the conflict an expression of sympathy was sent by the Committee to the family. On the 3 October 1918 for instance it was resolved at the Welcome Home Committee meeting to send a written expression of sympathy to Mr and Mrs WA Williams on the loss of their son Sergeant George Williams.

For those soldiers that returned it was common practice for the Committee to present them with an engraved medal and organise a social for them as guest of honour. Such was the case in October 1918 for Private Groves and Corporeal Morris. It also ensured that the names of returned soldiers was listed in the local press. The Committee also worked to ease returned soldiers back into the community by ensuring that here government payments and sustenance cheques were received, were preferenced in employment and in listing properties suitable for returned

serviceman. For this a Repatriation Sub-Committee was formed.

Of particular interest is the avenue of Plane Trees at the Eltham Gateway Entrance that honours those who served in World War 1. The trees had plaques with the name of soldiers who had enlisted. The tree planting was organised by a Welcome Home Committee, chaired of course by Thomas Sapsford. The Shire Council donated £10 and the committee raised the balance. In 1921 the Council took over the care of The Avenue of Honour.

### **The Memorial Altar**

The present-day altar of Saint Margaret's of blackwood was given to the church in 1925 in memory of those soldiers connected with the congregation that were killed in the Great European War. It was made by a Mr Lloyd of Eltham and was described by The Advertiser as being *supported by six turned pillars, which stand on a handsome base. On the front of the altar the words, 'Holy, Holy, Holy' are neatly carved and on a silver plate below is the following inscription...* The inscription lists the 13 names of those men killed in the conflict.

The service of dedication and consecration was conducted by the Very Revd. Archdeacon Hindley of Melbourne who was assisted by the Vicar, the Revd. JA Peck. The Archdeacons faculty to conduct the ceremony was read by the Vicar, after which the Archdeacon carried out the solemn service.

### **Postscript**

The Australian War Memorial Site comments on the Great European War. It states *for Australia, as for many nations, the First World War remains the most costly conflict in terms of deaths and casualties. From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted, of which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.*

It continues, *the outbreak of war was greeted in Australia, as in many other places, with great public enthusiasm. In response to the overwhelming number of volunteers, the authorities set exacting physical standards for recruits. Yet, most of the men accepted into the army in August 1914 were sent first to Egypt, not Europe, to meet the threat which a new belligerent, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), posed to British interests in the Middle East and the Suez Canal.*

Finally it concludes, *the effect of the war was also felt at home. Families and communities grieved following the loss of so many men, and women increasingly assumed the physical and financial burden of caring for families. Anti-German feeling emerged with the outbreak of the war, and many Germans living in Australia were sent to internment camps. Censorship and surveillance, regarded by many as an excuse to silence political views that had no effect on the outcome of war, increased as the conflict continued. Social division also grew, reaching a climax in the bitterly contested (and unsuccessful) conscription referendums held in 1916 and 1917. When the war ended, thousands of ex-servicemen, many disabled with physical or emotional wounds, had to be re-integrated into a society keen to consign the war to the past and resume normal life.*