



FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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Saint Margaret's in the 1980s

Welcome to the twenty-fifth 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

This issue of "From the Archives" describes what Saint Margaret's was like in the 1980s. In the previous issue we featured, the 1950s. Now we come three decades later to the 1980s. The author's disclaimer is that this decade has not been thoroughly researched yet. However, this Issue primarily uses the archival sources of the Annual General Meeting Reports, Registers, Financial Reports and "Megs Mag". Many current parishioners of Saint Margaret's were also parishioners in the 1980s, albeit a "tad" younger than they are now. Nevertheless, whilst memories are alert we welcome their recollections and any records they possess, including photographs, as additions to the Parish archives.

We will describe the 1980s under four main headings. They are:

- The Reverend Ronald Dowling
- Worship and Sacraments
- Church Groups
- Property and Finance

Unlike the previous issue, we choose not to name laypersons of this period. As previously observed many continue today as proactive parishioners, we fear not naming some may cause offence.

The Reverend Ronald Dowling

The Revd. Ronald Lindsay Dowling was vicar at Saint Margaret's during the 1980s. He left Eltham in 1989. Fr. Ron was initially a primary teacher in Victoria gaining a TPTC in 1966. He was ordained to the diaconate (1973) and the priesthood (1974) by the Archbishop of Melbourne. He was trained at St John's College, Morphett, NSW. He holds a BA from the University of Melbourne, MA from Catholic University of America, Washington DC, and Doctor of Ministry from CDSP, Berkeley, CA, USA. He served in the Parishes of Malvern and Merlynston before coming to Eltham. He has

served on the General Synod for Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide, and has been a member of the General Synod Liturgy Commission continuously since 1982. He has also been a member of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation and served as its Chair for a number of years.

Ron was invited to take up the position at Saint Margaret's in 1979 and the invitation letter and his positive response is held in the Parish Archives. Whilst at Eltham his strong interest in, and regard for the liturgy, was reflected in the high standard of worship. His particular expertise in the sacrament of Baptism meant that it was regarded at Saint Margaret's with great awe and importance. Candidates were well prepared for the sacrament.

Fr. Ron is well-remembered also for his devotion to music, especially opera, cinema, and travel. He has been known to enjoy the odd glass of wine, although this was usually given-up as a Lenten sacrifice each year

Worship and Sacraments

Mention has already been made of the high standard of worship during the incumbency of Fr. Dowling. The experimental liturgies of the 1970s gave way to the adoption of "An Australian Prayer Book". Saint Margaret's embraced the freedom, flexibility and greater intelligibility of the new liturgy. This was a period when the Easter and the Christmas services were very well attended. This was particularly reflected at the Easter dawn and Christmas midnight service. Many current parishioners still remember a number of occasions at the Christmas midnight service when "overflow" attendees stood outside the external doors and in the kitchen area of the mud brick hall.

Liturgical music was a very important part of the services not just for the major feast days. Saint Margaret's day was of great importance and after the special patronal festival the congregation had a picnic lunch on the west lawn. Sometimes at 5pm a 1662 Evensong was said to close Saint Margaret's day. During the 1980s our patron was recognised as Margaret of Scotland. This contrasts with previous decades when Margaret of Antioch was considered patron.

Until Panton Hill was re-established as a separate Parish, in 1986, the usual services and service times in the 1980s for the three centres were as follows: Eltham 7.45am Morning Prayer, 8am Holy Eucharist, 9.15am Sung Holy Eucharist and 5.30pm Holy Eucharist. Panton Hill 10am Holy Eucharist. Research 11.15am Morning Prayer.

In 1981 the 120th anniversary of the opening of the church on December 12 1861 was celebrated. A Sung Eucharist service was conducted on the Friday 11 December 1981 at 6pm followed by celebratory dinner at 7,30pm. The preacher at the Eucharist was Archbishop Frank woods. A parish picnic in Westerfolds Park was also organised for Saturday the 12 December, the actual anniversary day, at 11am.

The practice of admitting children to communion began in December 1983. A later review reported that the practice had overwhelming support of the parish and should continue for children who had understanding of the Eucharist and the significance of Holy Communion.

During the 1980s Saint Margaret's was a strong supporter of Theological Field Training for candidates for Holy Orders. Our students during the 1980s were Clem Taplin (nee Woods), Elizabeth Smith, Jenny Rockwell, Howard Parkinson and Don Morgan.

The interior of the church in the 1980s had changed since the 1950s. The altar and altar rails had been moved away from north wall allowing the Priest to stand, as "president" of the Eucharist, behind the altar facing the people. The dorsal covering the Altar window had been removed in 1963. Also, in 1963, the 1861 pews, purchased from the Baptist church, were replaced with the blonde wood ones we have today. Above the altar the splendid crucifix of Matcham Skipper had been erected. The resurrection stained glass windows have been installed as had the Honour Roll of ordained clergy who had been in charge of the parish. During the 1980s the pulpit was removed and a new organ, the present one, was purchased. The font was placed near the west entrance door to the church as is customary.

Church Groups

A number of church groups, both formal and informal, operated in this period. They include those referred to below. Not all that operated are listed.

Megs Mag, a parish magazine, is an invaluable historical record. The first issue was March 1977 and no issues survive until 1980 and then only one. It was run by a small committee.

A 1981 issue of Megs Mag contains a Report from the Missions Committee, a committee that operated in its own right.

Some will remember the Charismatic Bible Study and Prayer Group that was newly formed in 1981.

The Ladies Guild operated during the 1980s. However, in a 1986 issue of Megs Mag was a plea "please don't let it die". It is "89 years old".

The Caritas or Young Wives Group was still active in the 1980s.

A small group supported the Mission to Streets and Lanes a forerunner to Anglicare.

Christian Education included the Monday Club and Sunday school. Later in the decade Saint Margaret's joined with the Eltham Uniting church to run the successful Selihoo Program

A Youth Group operated during the 1980s. In 1985 a junior and a senior youth group operated

An Embroidery Group created the beautiful kneelers that are now distributed throughout the church of the pews.

Parishioners from Saint Margaret's were, and continue to be, proactive in Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) from the first national conference held in Sydney. Yes, Sydney.

In the mid 1980s a group called Megs Minders was formed. The minders were parishioners who sought to support other parishioners in their times of need.

A pastoral care program of new parishioners organised get-togethers that involved the presence of two hosts.

Saint Margaret's was also well represented on the Eltham Churches Social Justice Group operating in this period.

Donations of food for those in need organised from Saint Marks Fitzroy was supported by parishioners. This continues today.

In 1988 the Combined Churches Opportunity Shop had been operating since circa 1960. Saint Margaret's has been well represented and this also continues to the present day.

Property and Finance

In the 1980s the site donated by Henry Dendy in 1860 contained four buildings that exist to the present day. It comprises the 1861 church, the 1870 parsonage, now referred to as Dendy House, the 1958 vicarage and the mud brick hall completed in 1978 with the cloister of the north east area behind the church. The vicarage was used by the Revd. Ronald Dowling as it was by the next two vicars. It was in 1979 that the Historic Building Preservation Council added Saint Margaret's church to the Register of Historic buildings. During the 1980s Saint Margaret's church and the parsonage gained National Trust Classification.

In the 1981 Vicars Report, the problem of overcrowding at Eltham on any Sunday was highlighted. This was also the year when the Ecclesiastical Advisers of the National Trust visited Saint Margaret's in late September to advise on the state of the church building and its fabric. At the end of the decade a major property task was the preparation of the vicarage for occupation by the new priest

The financial concerns at the commencement of the 1980s differ little from that of today. It was noted at the 1981 Annual General Meeting (AGM) that the operating expenditure exceeded budget, and this was expected to be the case in the future. The treasurer stated "that each of us must consider the level of our own giving, as this is really the main source of our income".

At the 1988 AGM, Fr. Ron ruefully reported "when I came in 1980 we were having a Planned Giving Programme. The parish finances were not in good shape...things have not changed all that much. Certainly we have done a lot of capital work and maintenance, but this year (1988) we face a budget deficit of \$2000 at least". He also observed in the same Report that we are no longer a growing Parish. The growth rate had tapered off in 1986.