



FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES
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The Church of England in Eltham: 1840s and 1850s

Welcome to the twenty-sixth 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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Background

A Public Meeting was held on the 25 May 1860 to decide on the building of a Church of England in Eltham. Saint Margaret's opened for Divine Worship on the 12 December 1861, hence our celebration of 150 years. However, there were pioneering Church of England families in the Eltham District after land was released circa 1840. Have you ever wondered how they "practised" their religion in the absence of a church building and why it was decided in 1860 to build a church. This issue includes reflections on both questions.

An Englishman and Anglican, Josiah Holloway was very influential in the subsequent development of Eltham and the English church. He was the first private developer of Eltham. He was granted land from Dalton to Brisbane and York streets and from Bolton to beyond Bible Street. This area north of Dalton Street became known as Little Eltham. The government designated township of Eltham was south of Dalton street. Holloway offered his lots for sale in 1851. He also donated land for the purposes of the Church of England denominational school in Swan Street. It opened in 1853 and closed in 1872 when state aid was withdrawn from church schools.

Many of the pioneer families of Eltham, of the 1840s and 1850s, were Church of England, and some were very important to the planning and erection of the church. Family names include Wippell, Maplestone, Beale, Wingrove, Briggs, Benson, Warren and Harper. Henry Dendy and William Andrew were late arrivals but were very influential. In 1860, Henry Dendy donated the land on which Saint Margaret's was erected, its present site. William Andrew served

the church continuously in many capacities well into the 1880s.

A Temporary Church

We know that the Methodists of various varieties met for worship in the homes of adherents. However there was no purpose built Methodist church until 1880. We have no historical evidence until 1860 that similar worship meetings took place amongst the Anglicans. In all probability it existed. However, those wished to avail themselves of the sacraments had to make the journey to Saint John's at Heidelberg. At the 4 June 1860 meeting of the newly formed Eltham Church committee, Thomas Hunniford moved that a temporary building to serve as a place of worship be obtained. The committee minutes reveal that the building secured, probably a cottage, was owned by a committee member John Gardner and it was rented to the committee. It was located near the old court house on the corner of Maria (Main) and Brougham Streets. William Andrew fitted-out the interior. Collectors were appointed to raise funds. William Page and Thomas Hunniford offered to take care of the cleaning and lighting.

The congregation must have quickly outgrown the building because on the 2 July 1860 Henry Dendy described the building as quite inadequate to the wants of the district. Tenders were let to extend the building 10 feet. Jarrold and Wall were successful tenderers and were paid £11.

At the 20 August committee meeting an application by Mrs Greenwood to sweep out the building was received. This is the first of the few instances when a woman is referred to in the committee minutes.

An 1860 Statement of Accounts of the Eltham Temporary Church Fund is revealing. Thomas Batt and David Clark are two prominent subscribers. Expenditures indicate that the temporary church had a pulpit, and, that candlesticks were used in worship.

A week after Saint Margaret's opened the temporary church was vacated and the key returned to John Gardner the owner. At the 19 December committee meeting it was resolved that all outstanding accounts associated with the temporary church be settled.

Saint John's Heidelberg

The nearest Church of England for residents of Eltham and Little Eltham prior to December 1861 was Saint John's in Heidelberg. This church is the third oldest in the Diocese of Melbourne. The oldest is Saint James Old Cathedral West Melbourne, and then, Saint Peter's Eastern Hill. It was the first rural church in the colony of Port Phillip and was built to serve the land owners and farming community of the Yarra Valley.

There is abundant evidence of association between Saint John's and Eltham Anglicans. In Saint John's Baptismal Register the first entry, 22 October 1848, is for a child whose father was a farmer from the Parish of Nillumbik. Parish in this sense is civil not ecclesiastical. Entry 18 of the Register is again of interest. Mary the daughter of Isaac and Elizabeth Briggs was baptised on the

10 April 1849. Isaac is also described as a farmer from the Parish of Nillumbik. He served later as vestryman and trustee at Saint Margaret's. Indeed later in the Register, Isaac is listed again as a carpenter, and that he and Elizabeth, are from Little Eltham. There are numerous entries in Saint John's Baptismal Register of persons from Little Eltham and Eltham, many of whom later served at Saint Margaret's.

Similarly, the Saint John's Marriage Register and Banns Book include parties from Little Eltham and Saint Helena. These are very early entries dating back to the first entry of 1854. Important Church of England families, especially those associated with Saint Katherine's Saint Helena, were strongly associated with Saint Johns. These include the Beale, Maplestone, Nodin and Wippell families. On the 20 March 1856 Walter Wippell married Eliza Dowles, on the 11 June 1856 John Lindsay Beale married Emma Bennett and on the 15 July 1857 Charles Maplestone married Margaret Nodin. Interestingly, on the 2 September 1858 Arthur Joseph Pickering of Bedfordshire England married Ann Rosier of Walsham-Le-Willows, Suffolk. Arthur is described as a farmer from Bulleen and Ann is from Little Eltham. The astute among you will recognise Arthur as being appointed vicar of Saint Margaret's in 1874.

Saint John's Heidelberg has a Register of Burials that go back to 1854. Again they reveal strong association between Saint John's and Eltham Anglicans. An early entry, number 13 June 17 1849, records the death and burial of 5 year old Jane Patten of Little Eltham. Entry 66 records the death and burial of Katherine Rose Beale (nee Young) of Saint Helena. She was wife to Anthony Beale. Entry 28, February 20 1860, records the death and burial of Sarah Dendy of the Eltham Mill. She was 57 years old and of course wife of Henry Dendy.

There is not much evidence to support the notion that the priest from Saint John's paid many pastoral visits to Eltham. The Saint John's Heidelberg Preachers Book has only one clear reference to Little Eltham. It is recorded that on the 9 December 1855 the Revd. James Lynar will administer the sacrament (Holy Communion) at Greensborough and then at Little Eltham. The Revd. Lynar was vicar of Saint John's from 1855 to 1869. He was present at the laying of the foundation stone for Saint Margaret's in 1861. However, we have no records of other contacts. Charles Mash Maplestone and Anthony Beale were also present at the laying of the Foundation stone.

The Timing of the Decision

Why was it decided to build a church in Little Eltham in May 1860? We can only make inferences in response to this question. It is suggested that Henry Dendy was an important "driving force" as he was relatively new to Eltham. He had already been involved with the establishment of a new church in Brighton and so sought to replicate this initiative in Eltham. He was already a leading layman of the church and was elected chairman and treasurer of the founding church committee.

According to the 1856 census the population of Eltham Town was 129 and of Little Eltham 358 persons and growing. Perhaps a critical mass of Church of

England adherents had been reached for them to seek a church of their own. In those times it was common practice for each community to want their own church.

Anglicans traditionally place greater emphasis on the sacraments of Baptism, and especially, Holy Communion than other reformed denominations. As Eltham became more settled it was natural that the local Anglicans would increasingly feel deprived of the sacraments. Only an ordained priest may administer the sacrament of Holy Communion. It was a considerable distance to travel to Saint John's Heidelberg, the closest Anglican Church to Eltham. This was despite the opening of a road and constructing a bridge over the Plenty River in the early 1840s. Perhaps the need for a local church to administer the sacraments was becoming stronger. However, history informs us that Eltham had to wait until June 1864 before Bishop Perry appointed an ordained minister to Eltham.

The historical record strongly suggests that the vision and initiative to build a church at Eltham came from the laypersons of the district. The English church at Eltham was not a part of some "grand" diocesan plan for the Melbourne Diocese but rather resulted from local vision and advocacy. These laypersons, as history confirms, were men of some vision and organising ability. No doubt they were backed by some remarkable women but unfortunately the archival records are largely silent about them.

It may be asked why the Church of England for the district did not result in it being Saint Katherine's at Saint Helena. It opened in 1858, three years before Saint Margaret's. Many leading lay families closely associated with the Eltham church, Beale, Wingrove and Maplestone, were already strongly associated with Saint Katherine's. Perhaps the answer is that Saint Katherine's was a chapel and a family chapel at that for the Beale family and its relatives and friends. A full time clergyman associated with a fully-fledged church is not the same as for a chapel.

In summary, we can only conjecture about the decision and its timing to build a Church of England at Eltham. The answer may be found amongst the varying points made previously.

Summary

It is clear that in the 1840s and 1850s there were many Church of England adherents settled in Eltham. Many were already leading members of society. It is also very probable that the met for divine worship in some premises and then in 1860 in a temporary church. It is also clear that there was a strong association with Saint John's Heidelberg and the Eltham Anglicans. They married, they baptised their children, they attended the Holy Communion and they had their funeral there. By 1860, they wished to establish their own church. There were only 32 churches in Victoria established before Saint Margaret's. The church at Eltham is therefore of great historical value. There is much to the argument that its establishment was a local layperson initiative. Albeit, with Bishop Perry's approval.