

FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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The Church of the Transfiguration Research

Welcome to the 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 the 150th anniversary in 2011. This version was slightly revised in September 2011.

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

The Parish of Eltham was formerly a large geographical area with many centres and included Kinglake and St Helena. Even as late as July 1958 it comprised St Matthews Panton Hill, St Marks Hurstbridge, The Church of the Transfiguration Research, St Andrews St Andrews (formerly Queenstown and St John's Hazel Glen. This issue features The Church of the Transfiguration Research. In other issues in 2011 St Matthews Panton Hill and the recently merged partner Church, St Faith's Montmorency will also be featured. The Author acknowledges the use made of "The Future of the Church at Research" authored by Andrew Lemon March 1990 and "The Origins of the Research Church", author unknown but probably Ivy Reynolds and undated but probably 2004. I will assume Ivy is the author and cite her as such.

The Old Church Early Years

The Research State School was opened in 1889 and the Church of England and the Methodists shared the facility. Usually members of both denominations attended each others service. The harmonium, altar and seats were stored under the School and had to be set up and then stored away for each service. Sunday school and Sunday school concerts, as were other musical entertainments, well remembered. Ivy remembers one year when "a Mr Randall who had two children in the Sunday school donated a toy for every child. I still use the little round stool which was my gift at the time". She also recalls "another exciting event was the showing of the lantern slides. The religious story in pictures would be much enjoyed by adults and children alike. The large kerosene lamps for lighting required a lot of care and preparation. The suppers were tremendous events; the milk for the coffee was boiled in large kerosene containers on the fire outside"

In 1925/6 the congregation obtained a church of its own. Ivy recalls "the owner of the hotel, Mr West gave a block of land opposite the school. Mrs Story, a member of the congregation, arranged for a room which had been her husband's library to be brought up by horse-drawn lorry from

Sandringham and placed on the new church block". This land was situated on the "low" (west) side of Main Road.

Later the building was enlarged and a vestry and sanctuary added. The building was a centre of social activity People brought along games to play and there was much music-making. Ivy recalls *"the Doney boys brought a banjo and a violin and there was a piano which Bill Lake would play with great aplomb. His Pink lady was very much in demand"*. There was an annual bonfire and a picnic on the river. The Band of Hope also met in the church. This was one of a number of organisations dedicated to temperance or the prohibition of alcohol. It encouraged leadership in the young and discouraged the use of alcohol.

Ivy states that *"the women begun a Ladies Guild which met monthly to make money for the care of the church and the payment on the minister's stipend"*. This was later known as the Quota a percentage paid by the smaller centres of the Parish.

During 1931 The Reverend Tolhurst, Vicar from 1929 to 1931, in the middle of Sunday Service at Research announced no doubt to a startled congregation, *"we will now close as the hotel is on fire"*. He could see it as he was facing the open door to a view across the road. It was a portent because the church itself was later destroyed by fire.

The Old Church Later Years

When Elizabeth Doney a parishioner at Research passed away she left three blocks to the church. It was on this land that the Church of The Transfiguration moved to on the "high" (east) side of Main Road. Ivy recalls how this came to be, *"the house next door ...was falling into decay, much to the anxiety of the mother and family living there and thankfully they managed to have a used house from the suburbs brought and placed on their block. This house-mover saw our plight and offered to move the church over to the new site"*. We can speculate that Ivy made sure "our plight" was well and truly noticed. Ivy continues *"in return for the moving he was given the block of land on which the old church stood. We felt it was divine intervention and dutifully gave thanks"*.

The congregation made arrangements with the State Electricity Commission and the Postmaster Generals Department to have the building readied for the move. It was taken on wheels to Ingram's Road where it sat overnight. Next day, 11 May 1964, it was taken past the Post Office and Store along Raglan Road and up through the orchard where there was no road until it reached the recently bulldozed site. On 17 May 1964 the first worship service in the "new" Research centre took place. However, on 23 July 1964 fire destroyed the church. It was suggested that the fire was deliberately lit in some curtains at the back of the altar and suspicion was that it was a neighbour. In the midst of such sadness with the building beyond repair the brass cross was still standing on the altar. It was seen as a very visible sign of God's presence remaining with people of The Transfiguration.

A momentous decision accompanied by much prayer had to be made. Should the Church of The Transfiguration be rebuilt? In a letter dated 18 August 1964 from the Diocesan Registrar it mentions a question from the Finance and Standing Committee that was posed regarding the rebuilding - *"is it wise to rebuild at all in this area"*. The vicar of the day Donald Longfield (1964-1969) in the 1964 AGM Report stated *"this is not an easy decision to make. I have struggled for six months over the issue and for my part my conscience does not find relief. I ask you to spend a further three months praying about this"*. After three months the Research congregation decided it wished to rebuild. The main points made in favour was an obligation to those people who started the church in research, it was needed for a missionary task especially to children and fewer families would attend church and not go to the Eltham centre. This was not the last time this matter would be considered.

Some indication can be discovered of the resilience and innovativeness of the research people in raising funds for the rebuilding. Ivy says *"a novel but effective suggestion for making money came from the RSL who proposed we collected and rolled newspaper to take to a butcher at the Victoria Market. The ladies Guild got busy and we rolled and bundled until the RSL got their liquor licence and the church was paid off. We also sent paper to the Fairfield paper mill to the detriment of Harold Stoke's truck, but he never complained"*.

The New Church

On 28 August 1966 the foundation stone of the new church was laid by Mrs Elsie Mcnee. Unfortunately it was disfigured within an hour of the laying, another malicious act against the research church.

The architects Blyth and Josephine Johnson designed the new church after that of Retreat House in Cheltenham. Ivy expresses her view *"in all honesty we would have liked a larger building with more room for the needs of children, but we went ahead. Later on the church proved to be a little dark as some of the windows planned for the chancel end were never put in and so a skylight was donated by Elsie Reynolds"*. Ivy continues *"having finished the church it was now time to turn our attention to the toilets. The toilets from the old church had been freshly painted and stood like sentinels on the block...We decided that had to go. They burned well. After much planning it was decided to build a male/ female toilet attached to the meeting room south wall"*. The author and many present day parishioners would view the statement *"after much planning"* as a massive understatement. The planning took 13 years and was a great saga that tested the patience of many but is now looked back upon with much amusement.

At 3 pm on 18 December 1966 the "new" Church of The Transfiguration was dedicated with joy and thankfulness by the venerable Archdeacon W H Graham. Prior to this on the 4 December 1966 Mr Richard Talbot of Research was instituted as Diocesan Lay Reader. Transfiguration has a long history of Lay Readers and layperson's conducting the service. The Vicar's of the day would not necessarily visit the centre every week especially in early times when the Parish comprised many centres. On 5 August 1973 a Festival of the Consecration of the "new" Church took place Archbishop Frank Woods

conducted the consecration. The Archbishop bade the congregation to kneel and pray in silence for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Remaining in that position they all sang Veni Creator Spiritus. The service fittingly ended with the Hymn Now Thank We All Our God.

However, there were some worrying dark clouds on the horizon for the Research Centre. It remained small with no growth. A conference at Research led by Archdeacon Noel Delbridge was held on 16 September circa 1979. The Archdeacon suggested to the 17 members present that they reflect and consider all possible alternatives for the present building and land, setting aside all judgements. In his review he strongly expressed the view that it was a luxury for such a small number of people to have such a building and to have a service every Sunday. He pointed out that to him it was an issue of Stewardship, of buildings and of ministry. The outcome of the conference was a desire expressed by most that the Centre should continue to operate. Fears were expressed that with the imminent appointment of a new vicar (Ron Dowling 1979-1989) the Centre would be closed. The Archdeacon responded that he was certain the new vicar would be interested in a growing viable congregation. He concluded that the future of Transfiguration depends on every one of us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and certainly not on just a few.

The Closure of the Research Centre

The whole matter of growth and viability for the Research Centre was the subject of discussion for at least 40 years. Andrew Lemon, a parishioner at research, prepared a discussion paper on this topic in March 1990. He discussed all sides of the issue. He probably gets to the heart of it when he writes *“most of the congregation at Research enjoy the family-like quality of our services, where everyone has a contribution to make; ironically this becomes more fragile as a congregation increases. Nevertheless the congregation as it now stands is only just viable. I think we recognise the need for growth”*. He then positively discusses some of the initiatives he believes may bring about this growth. Sadly this did not eventuate and in 2004 the centre was finally closed.

On 21 February 2004 a Service of Thanksgiving for the Church of The Transfiguration 1925-2004 was conducted. The Thanksgiving Eucharist included brief reviews of each of the historical periods of the church. A week later on 28 February a Service of Closure of the Church of The Transfiguration was conducted with much sadness and grief. It was summed up in the solemn words of the Archbishop present *“I Peter Robert Watson, Archbishop of Melbourne, do hereby revoke the said Sentence [issued by my predecessor] and do remit this building, and all objects remaining in it, for any lawful and reputable use, according to the laws of the land. This building having been deconsecrated and secularized I declare to be no longer subject to my canonical jurisdiction”*. Currently, it operates as a child care centre. Following this Service at Research all moved to St Margaret’s Eltham for a Service of Transformation and a welcome to those that had been members of the Research congregation and their precious symbols.