

# FROM THE PARISH ARCHIVES

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## St Matthews Panton Hill

Welcome to the eighth 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.

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

### Introduction

From 1940 the Parish of Eltham-cum-Panton Hill was 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 St Matthews Panton Hill. In another issue in 2011, St Faith's Montmorency will be featured. The Author acknowledges the use made of the booklet titled St Matthews Anglican Church Panton Hill 1896-1996 by Glynn Davies.

### Early Years

The place Panton Hill was formerly known as Kingstown and it was a few miles from Queenstown the former name of St Andrews. Church services were held for many years prior to the erection of St Matthews in 1896. These services were held in an axe-split paling building which was used as a school, hall, church and Sunday school. The church is situated on the corner of Church Road and Main Road Panton Hill.

It has always been understood that the land for the church was given for a sum of £4/-/- by James Owen Hughes on 17 January 1896. James was a school teacher who lived in Cherry Tree Road. He probably donated the money as well.

The Reverend J Francis was the first minister of the church and he remained until 1907. The first baby baptised was Eric Edwin Coutie

The church was given its own vicarage in Cheery Tree Road in 1912 by Augusta Gibson. The vicar of the day, the Reverend E Selwyn Chase, who was living in Queenstown moved to the vicarage in the same year. His wife later had the vicarage and the church hall enlarged and improved at her own expense circa 1924. She also ran the Sunday school. They left the parish in 1926.

As is to be expected in a rural Parish the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival was a popular annual event. In the early days all the produce was home-grown or home-made. In particular fruit was dominant as many of the parishioners were orchardists. It was them that called on the local residents in Autumn each year for the thanksgiving offerings. Two men in each road, in horse-drawn buggies, drays, carts and even market wagons, collected the offerings. The thanksgiving service was held in the church with the altar area decorated with a selection of the harvest gifts. The arch of the sanctuary was decorated with autumn vine leaves. A special loaf was baked to accompany a bunch of locally grown grapes on a platter that was placed on the altar symbolising the Lord's Supper. An auction was held in the public hall, usually two nights later, and people came from far and wide to attend. The proceeds were donated to the St John's Home for Boys.

Prior to the 1960s life was generally centred on the church. St Matthew's, for instance, had its own junior and senior cricket teams in the 1920s and 1930s. The church had a tennis team as well. Like so many churches it was proposed to build a tennis court on church land. This was made unnecessary when a public court was erected. In addition a men's club was began in 1926 and a young men's club in 1934.

Like many other churches, from the 1930s on, fund raising incorporated a "grand effort" each year. At St Matthews the annual fete was such an event. It is recalled in the Davies booklet that "*for example in 1933 Panton Hill – refreshments, strawberries and cream. Opportunity stall and flower stall. Queenstown -fancy goods, menswear. Hurstbridge -confectionary, icecream, softdrinks, cake stall. Hazel Glen -Christmas gifts, Christmas toys. There were also games and competitions. In this particular year an 'Ugly man' competition was included. In the lead up meetings the prize was going to be £1/1/- but economic rationalisation took place just in time and the prize became an illustration of an Ugly Man!*". Probably not politically correct today!!!

The Reverend Muspratt ministered for two and half years but is remembered for playing a critical role in getting a faltering Parish "back on its feet". It is of interest that in 1935-36 the Parish of Panton Hill was made up of more churches and with a much larger in area than the Eltham Parish. The churches were, St Matthews Panton Hill, St Mark's Hurstbridge, St Andrew's Queenstown, St Peter's Kinglake, St John's Hazel Glen, St Pauls Yarra Glen, Christ Church Christmas Hills and St Barnabas Steels Creek. Two former churches that were also part of this Parish were St Michael's Smiths Gully and All Angels Upper Diamond.

In 1940 the Parishes of Panton Hill and Eltham were combined and were known as the Parish of Eltham-cum-Panton Hill. In August 1958 this unwieldy organisation was further dissolved. St Andrew's and St Mark's became part of the Parish of Diamond Creek.

### **Later Years**

Sunday school was formally organised in 1949 under the leadership of M Frogitt. In 1958 Daisy Smith took over this leadership. It is recalled in the

Davies booklet that *“the Christmas concerts on the stage in the Gibson Hall in the 1950s were memorable, especially the costumes. Shepherds in their dressing gown robes and towel head gear and Angels in white sheets and gauze wings and cock-eyed halos...Mary (usually in blue) and Joseph sat by the hay filled manger with baby Jesus (a big baby sized celluloid doll)...There was a chaotic charm about the children’s earnest efforts that put the adult’s ability to keep a straight face to the test”*.

The St Matthew’s Ladies Guild began in 1925. Meetings were held on Wednesday afternoons in the Gibson Hall where they organised fund raising activities and enjoyed a social get-together. The Guild functioned through to 1966 and then recommenced again in 1986. Members began an Op-Shop in the hall and a Monday club for bridge and card playing, and also scrabble.

In October 1958 the Vicar David Warner inaugurated a service of “The Blessing of the Plough”. This service has a long history in England. It is held just prior to starting ploughing for the new agricultural season. It reminds us that our life comes from the soil and that the plough, whether drawn by horse or tractor, is a symbol of humankind’s dependence on the cycle of the seasons and God’s gift of the harvest. The service was undertaken annually until 1968.

From the early 1980s the church held a candlelight carol service on the Sunday evening before Christmas in the Panton Hill Memorial Park. Such a service provided an opportunity to engage and share with other members of the local community. It involved local musicians and singers and often special items from the Sunday school students.

On the 1 January 1981 the Diocese made St Matthews a “centre” of the Parish of Eltham - the Parish of Eltham with Panton Hill. The decision was not popular with the parishioners at St Matthews but it was a recognised that the congregation could not support their own vicar.

In 1984 the Reverend Peter Lawry joined as assistant priest to the vicar Ronald Dowling with specific ministry to Panton Hill. The vicarage known as ‘Shangri-La’ was re-commissioned by Bishop James Grant as the Centre for Transformation on the 3 March 1984. Peter was to undertake a ministry to the ‘counter culture’ supported by ‘Instep’ of Deepdene with a focus on pastoral and personal growth. This was formalised when an ‘experimental church’ was set up in 1986 for a five year trial period. On the 1 January 1988 following receipt of proceeds from a sale of land and properties Panton Hill was again a Parish in its own right. The experimental church initiative ended when Peter Lawry moved to work in the private sector.

Over the period 21 September to Sunday 29 September 1996 St Matthew’s Panton Hill held a number of events as part of its centenary celebrations. It culminated in a special centenary service officiated by Archbishop Keith Rayner.

