

Revd Fr Robert Howell

St. John's Rectory,  
1B Parry Street,  
Newcastle, NSW, 2300

phone: (02) 4929-2691

23rd February 2000

Mr. Norm Barney, Newcastle Herald,  
Bolton Street, NEWCASTLE 2300

Dear Mr. Barney,

Thank you for the detailed article about St. John's, Newcastle, run in the *Herald* of February 12th in anticipation of the 140th anniversary of the church-building's opening. A copy of the service sheet for that day is attached - the data on pages 2 and 3 may be of interest.

Perhaps this additional information may find a place in your files —

**The Fund** — Walter Stevenson Davidson, a director of the AA Coy and a banker, co-instigated in 1854 the fund that your article mentions. He gave £5,000. Fifty-one other Anglican shareholders added £2,956-9-0. With interest of £401-8-9, the fund's total at 31st March 1856 was £8,357-17-9. A portion was allotted to the Peel River area, resulting in the construction of a church (Tamworth) and school-rooms on the Peel River company's estates. The remainder, as your article shows, was for the Hunter estate. [W. S. Davidson never saw the St. John's church / school-rooms. He did, however, visit Newcastle in 1809 - having walked, with others, 20 miles from Port Stephens (the *Sydney Gazette* article spells it Stevens) as strong winds had prevented their ship from turning into the Hunter.]

**Architect** — St. John's at Newcastle, St. Paul's at West Maitland and St. Paul's at Ipswich (now Qld) are strikingly similar, all built at about the same time under the authority of Bishop William Tyrrell. It seems that Bishop Tyrrell purchased designs for a school and a large church and managed to get his money's worth by using the church design three times. That the church designer was Edmund Blackett:

Bishop Tyrrell to builder Hesp of Hinton, 2/10/1856 —

"Your Contracts therefore are now for the following work, and the following amounts.

The entire building of the Schools according to Mr. Blackett's [sic] design, leaving out the Porches - and placing a Belfry in one gable of the Schoolroom .....

Again your Tender for the stone and brick work of the Church, with the windows according to the Plan of the Church Building at Ipswich, has been accepted ....."

Bishop Tyrrell to AA Coy Superintendent A. Hodgson, 11/2/1857 —

"... I have gone over, with Mr. Hesp, the additional expense of having the Church built exactly in conformity with Mr. Blackett's improved plans ....."

Although the William White your article mentions is certainly credited as the architect of St. Paul's, West Maitland, it is possible that he worked from the design or made construction drawings.

**Hamilton** — Re the 1858 remark about the new church-in-progress by Mr. Edward William Ter-rick Hamilton, Governor of the AA Coy: his Australian Dictionary of Biography entry suggests that Mr. Hamilton had a high opinion of his abilities ... was very argumentative ... a man of sharply expressed opinions ... his views were often intolerant. An 1858 visit would have shown the church only partly constructed. He (and his brother, the Bishop of Salisbury 1854-1869) were distantly related to W. S. Davidson; yet neither was a subscriber to the 1854 Fund.

Yours sincerely,