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CEP workers, from left, Susie Alderson, Sharon Close, Gloria Cerda and Thi Vo help with the hall's interior renovations.

## Face-lift for historic Cooks Hill hall

WORK is well advanced on the restoration of historic St John's parish hall in Parry St, Cooks Hill.

Parishioners are attempting to raise \$30,000 by the end of the year towards the cost of the restoration.

The hall was built in 1857 as a school and community centre.

St John's Anglican Church was built in 1860 and is the oldest church in Newcastle.

The rector of St John's, Canon Eric Barker, said much of the hall restoration was being funded by a \$154,000 CEP grant.

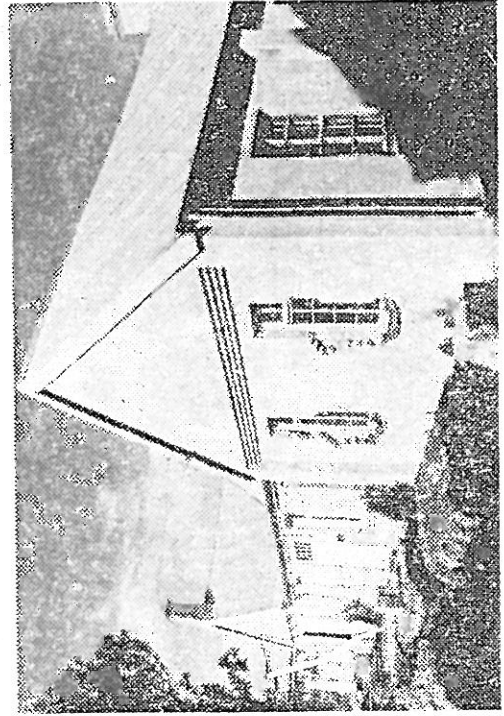
The grant had enabled the em-

ployment of about 16 young people, including women from Vietnam, the Philippines and Argentina, under the guidance of a number of skilled tradesmen.

Canon Barker said the restored hall would be used as a community centre, catering particularly for lonely people in the Cooks Hill area.

He said he expected the work would be completed by mid-December, and the restored hall would be fully used early in the new year.

The construction foreman, Mr Max Cummings, said the hall was being restored as closely as possible to its original condition.



Exterior restoration work at St John's parish hall.

11/11/84

# Historic hall has new lease of life

NH/14-2-985

A FORMERLY dingy, white and-infested building in Cooks Hill, with an earthen floor in one part and upstairs rooms unused for 30 years, has received a new lease of life.

St John's Anglican Church hall is one of three historically significant buildings — the church, hall and rectory — built in the 1850s to serve the Lowlands mining community after Bishop Tyrrell realised that only the elite on The Hill were attending services at Christ Church Cathedral.

A grant of land and money was provided by the Australian Agricultural Co and a parsonage (on the site of the present rectory) and school (the current hall) were built.

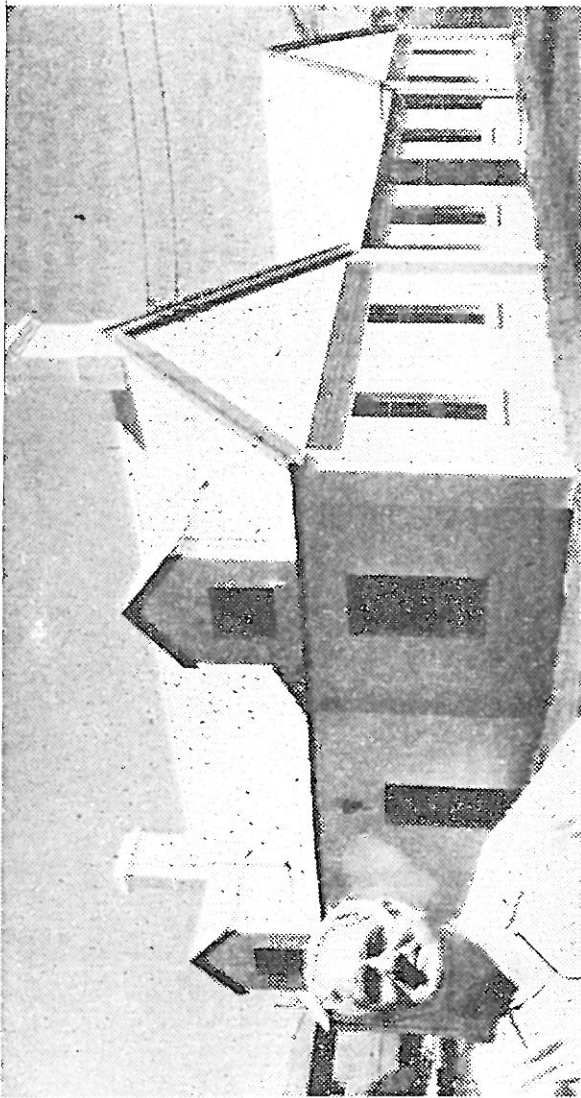
The church's foundation stone

was laid in 1857. Canon Eric Barker said recently that the school had 147 pupils in its heyday and was used as a community hall with an adjoining schoolmaster's house.

The church, Newcastle's oldest, was finished and consecrated on February 20, 1860.

Canon Barker said the hall was an embarrassment to the parish in 1983. Talk of demolition late that year prompted the Heritage Council to place a preservation order on the building.

When a small piece of parish land — formerly a tennis court — was sold that year to Newcastle Diocese for \$60,000 as a registry car park it was decided to use the funds to restore the hall. The parish unsuccessfully approached the



Canon Barker outside the renovated St John's Church hall at Cooks Hill yesterday.

Heritage Council for money. It then applied to do the renovations as a project under the Community Employment Program.

The parish was granted \$153,000, with the church contributing more than \$70,000, a sum which has not yet been fully raised.

The State Government re-

cently granted \$10,000 towards the renovations.

The restoration took six months and brought into use the upstairs rooms, providing a clean, modern kitchen and spacious main hall.

The hall is expected to become a community centre for the aged, the handicapped and the youth of the area.

The Governor, Sir James Rowland, will officially open the hall on Sunday.

About 400 people are expected to attend the thanksgiving service to mark the church's 125th anniversary.

The Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Rev Alfred Holland, will preach at the service and bless the restored hall.

Cooks Hill — Churches — St John's Church — Cooks Hill