

Foundation Stone "Lost"

St. John's, Cooks Hill, 100 Years Old

Just 100 years ago a large crowd of parishioners in their Sunday best gathered to watch the laying of the foundation stone of the St. John's Parish Church by the first Bishop of Newcastle, Bishop Tyrrell.

Today, although the church itself still stands almost in its original state on the one and a half acres of land given to the parish by the A. A. Company at the corner of Parry and Darby sts., the foundation stone is nowhere to be found.

Parish leaders organising centenary celebrations say that the stone is somewhere under a coating of cement which was placed over the original brickwork of the church some years ago.

Although the church itself was not completed until October, 1859, and not consecrated until February, 1860, the foundation stone of St. John's was laid 100 years ago and the parish was founded nearly four months earlier, on March 1, 1857, by Bishop Tyrrell.

Wide Boundaries

It was the first of the Newcastle Anglican parishes outside the Cathedral parish and included within its boundaries Wickham, Mayfield, Waratah, Hamilton, Broadmeadow, Glebe and Merewether. The parish boundaries adjoined those of the parishes of Wallisland and Maitland.

The first rector of the parish was Rev. L. H. Rumsden, MA, of Brasenose College, Oxford.

Mr. Rumsden arrived direct from England to commence his appointment in a parish whose parishioners were mainly mineworkers from AA Company collieries in the area.

Bishop's Letter

Some idea of the difficulties which faced him in his ministry is given in a letter written by Bishop Tyrrell to a church committee describing the parish as "the type of a district in which real missionary work had to be carried on if it was to be reclaimed from practical atheism."

On his arrival, Mr. Rumsden found that the people of his newly-formed parish had erected a school hall the year before his arrival.

Although there are no official records of the fact, it is believed that, even before Mr. Rumsden's appointment and the foundation of the parish, services were held in the school hall.

This hall, which is still standing and in use, was used as the parish church until the church building was completed.

On July 15, 1857, Bishop Tyrrell laid the foundation stone of the church on 1½ acres of land which was donated by the AA Company.

English Finance

Work on the church, which was mainly financed by the AA Company's shareholders in England, progressed slowly and was still going on in 1859 when Mr. Rumsden was transferred to Ipswich (Queensland).

His successor, the Rev. Bowyer E. Shaw, had the pleasure of seeing the completion of the church in 1859 and its subsequent consecration in 1860.

However, like Mr. Rumsden, he had only a short ministry in his coalmining parish and resigned in 1861 to take up an appointment in Brisbane.

£200 Stipend

There was no permanent appointment of a rector to the parish again until December, 1862, when the Rev. G. C. Bode was appointed.

An early record expresses considerable satisfaction at the payment of "the munificent sum" of £200 to Mr. Bode as his stipend in 1863. This sum, it states, "is very satisfactory considering the great depression now existing in the collieries, which constitute a considerable part of the parish."

Mr. Bode continued as rector until 1869, when he was succeeded by his brother, the Rev. (later Archdeacon) F. D. Bode, who became one of the Church's most beloved rectors in a ministry which extended over 33 years.

Original Windows

Since Archdeacon Bode's retirement in 1902, nine other men have served as rector of the parish, either in a permanent or temporary capacity, and the former widespread boundaries of the parish itself have shrunk to their present more manageable size.

The present rector, Canon E. R. Elder, is the eleventh permanent rector of the parish.

Links With Past

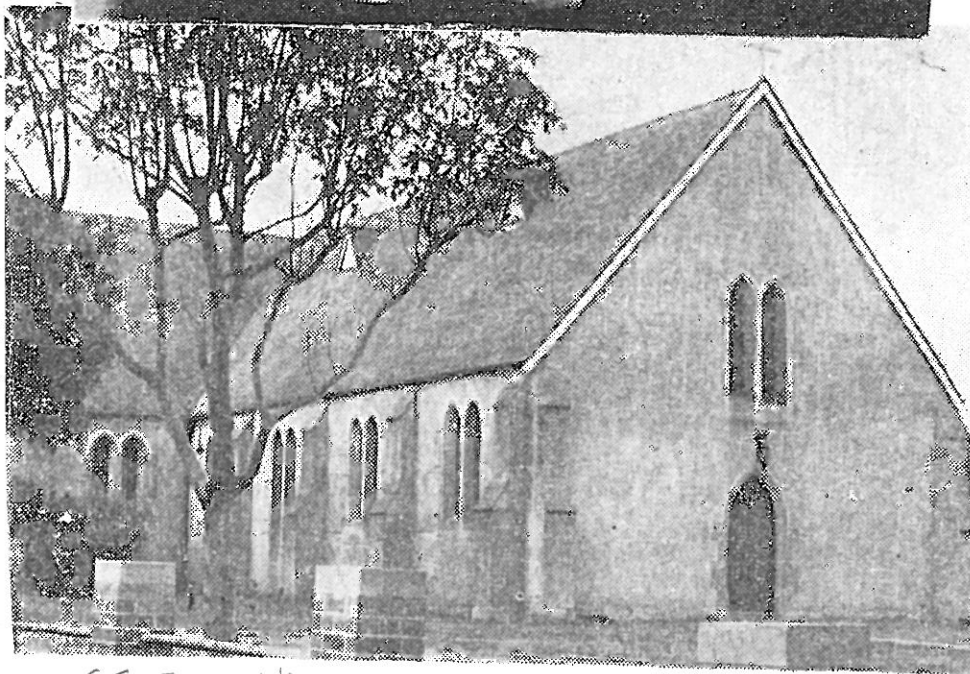
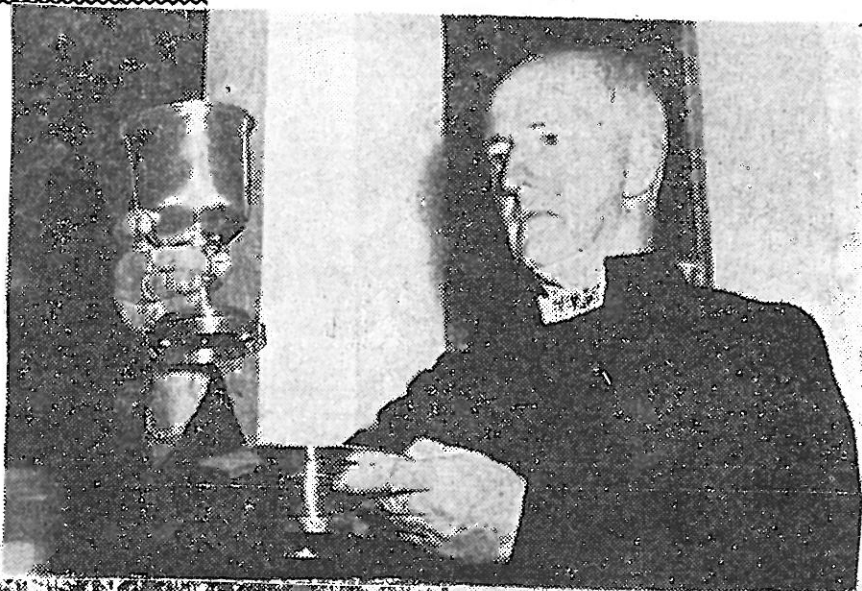
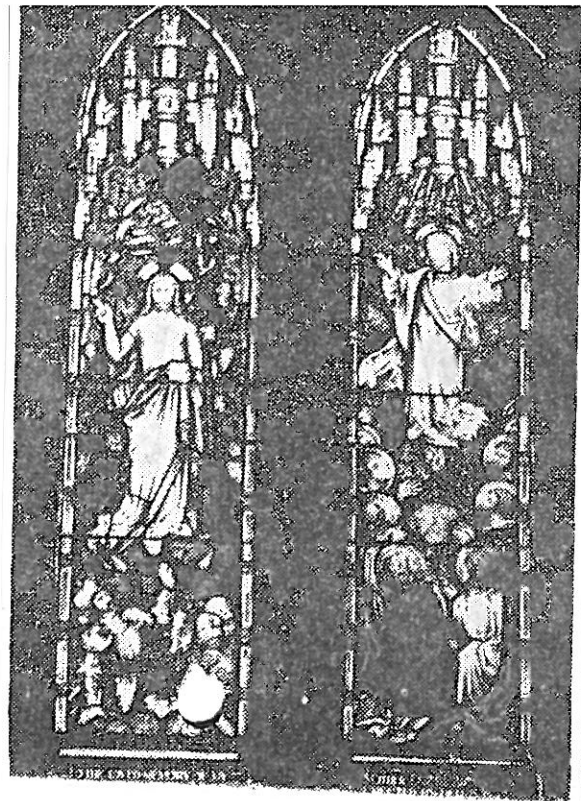
Links with the past are provided by the stained-glass windows selected by Bishop Tyrrell, which are still in position in some of the church window frames.

Communion vessels, which bear the inscription "Christ Church, King Town, Hunter's River," are still used on occasions.

The church bell brought from England and installed in the church in 1863 still calls parishioners to worship. The pipe organ installed in 1866 is still in operation.

Memorial windows in St. John's erected by the Cook family whose forebears gave Cook's Hill its name.

The Rector, Canon E. R. Elder, with the original Holy Communion vessels.



ST JOHN'S FROM PARRY AND DAWSON