

Christ Church - Rouse Hill

Winsome Phillis

Mr Robert Fitzgerald donated the land for the Rouse Hill Church and Cemetery. He was the son of the emancipist, Richard Fitzgerald, who built the Macquarie Arms at Windsor in 1815. Robert Fitzgerald was married to Elizabeth Rouse, youngest child of Richard and Elizabeth Rouse of Rouse Hill House.

The *Sydney Mail* of 20 December 1862 describes the opening of the church by the Dean of Sydney:

the attendance was very good, but no doubt the church would have been quite full had it not been for the heavy rain during the greater part of the afternoon. The church which is a very substantial and well finished buildingis capable of holding 300 people. '

The Church was of brick construction, consisting of a four-bay nave and a west porch. It was licensed on 16 July 1863. For some years it also served as a school, until c.1869 when a new schoolhouse was erected.

In 1878 the architect, Mr Blackett added a chancel and south vestry to the church. A triple lancet window was built into the chancel extension. The work was carried out by William Leman and was paid for by Hannah Rouse of Rouse Hill. The Minister at this time being the Rev. Mr. Schleicher. *The Cumberland Mercury* 20 July 1878 reported on the laying of the foundation stone by Miss Elizabeth Rouse:

September 4th was a red letter day for the little village of Rouse Hill. The day being fine, a number of the inhabitants came to witness the laying of the foundation stone of the chancel and vestry of the church

Miss Rouse was presented with a silver trowel and myall mallet. The trowel, (bearing an appropriate inscription to Miss E. Rouse), the manufacture of Mr. Edwin Jones, Sydney, was a beautiful specimen of colonial workmanship. The mallet was of myall wood polished, on one side of which a silver shield, with the monogram (sic) E.R. engraved thereon, had been let in. The mallet and trowel were enclosed in a polished cedar wood box.

On 19 November 1878 the Church was consecrated

The Terry and the Rouse families were great supporters of the Church. As well as the above additions Mrs Rouse paid for communion rails, and also a pulpit, reading desk, a new organ, carpeting and other furniture. Mrs Nina (Rouse) Terry played the organ there every Sunday for many years until she was nearly 90.²

Richard and Eleanor Rumery, their daughter Mary Ann, son Alfred, their nephew Les and various other members of the family were also involved with Christ Church Rouse Hill. Every Sunday Mary Ann and Alfred attended, always sitting in the same pew. Mary Ann gave my gifts and donations. In October 1931 she donated a silver mounted glass flagon for the use of wine at Holy Communion. In her will she left £30 to the church for 'general purposes'.

Mr *Alfred* Rumery provided funds for the new front fence and entry gates in 1929. In November 1930 *Alfred* Rumery died and was buried in the Church Cemetery in Mile End Road, where my of his family are buried.

Harriet and George Stranger were another family connected with the church. Their daughter Vera was treasurer and secretary for the Guild Committee who arranged the farewell for the Rev. Setchell and his family in 1923. She also sewed for and organised the Fundraising bazaars. Elsie, another daughter, also sewed for bazaars, and played the church organ for services and weddings. When Elsie married and left the district, the congregation presented her with an engraved silver tea service. Mrs Nina Terry then took over as the Church organist.³

Some of the other pioneer families who are buried in the Cemetery in Mile End Road are Brown, Cornwell, Pearce, Sherwood, Skinner, Stranger, Vaughan. The oldest headstone is that of Grace Schofield, dated 20 July 1874, although it is not necessarily the first burial, as no register exists prior to April 1886.

The first christening registered was on 26 January 1863 -Emma Maria Staff, daughter of James Samuel and Mary Ann Staff. James Staff was a farmer on the Windsor Road who had helped to raise funds and was joint manager for the erection of the church.⁴

The Windsor & Richmond Gazette reported on many activities of the Church:

July 28, 1888 -A concert was held at the school room. Rouse Hill, on the 20th. inst., the proceeds being given towards the purchase of an organ for the local Church of England. The building was filled and a very pleasant time was spent, the various performers giving every satisfaction. Those who assisted were -Mr & Mrs Rouse, Miss Robins, Miss McGilbury, Mr Tout (Windsor), and the Misses Pye, from Blacktown.

In 1908 a hall was erected behind the Church. The Foundation Stone of polished granite with carved gold letters, set at the base of the western end of the brick Hall reads:-

This Stone was Laid by the
Ven. Archdeacon Gunther
July 18, 1908
Rev. E.G. Cranswick
Rector

The Windsor & Richmond Gazette reported on the following events:

1913 August 23 -Jubilee of Christ Church, Rouse Hill.

1921 December 16 -Bazaar at Christ Church for improvements.

1923 August 24 -Diamond Jubilee at Christ Church & farewell to Setchells.

In 1929 Christ Church Rouse Hill was part of the Provisional district of St Paul's, Riverstone. *The Church News* -St Paul's, Riverstone -May, 1929:

In the cemetery at Rouse Hill we have a neat and well-kept burial place, thanks to the efficient trusteeship of Mr H. Verdon. The Rouse Hill Cemetery IS a private one, belonging to the Church, the site being given many years ago by Mrs. Rouse. Much work has been done here, and various improvements are projected for the near future.

In 1929 Mr J.T. Geeson, was the Church Secretary. The Church generally was in excellent condition, as the windows had been repaired, vestry refitted and new matting put down in the porch.

In 1931 *The Church News* gave a report on Rouse Hill Church and the very active group of workers who looked after it. In December 1931 there was report on a Memorial Tablet to be placed in the Church to the memory of Mr. E.S. Rouse, a Warden for many years. This tablet was dedicated on 7 February 1932 by Ven. Archdeacon Charlton.

In late 1932 Mr P. Gledhill of Manly and Warringah Historical Society paid a visit to Rouse Hill and gave a talk on the history and consecration of the church covering the following events in its history:⁵

1868 -Nov. 3: Lecture by the Rev. A.H. Stephens. Chairman: S. Terry, M.L.A. of Box Hill Amongst those present were G. Suttor of Baulkham Hills, Mrs. Richard Rouse, Mrs. S. H. Terry.

1869-Churchwardens: People's, J. E. Staff, R. Gilbert; Clergyman's, Mr. S. Schofield.

1872 -Rev. Britton, Incumbent of Castle Hill and Rouse Hill.

1872 -Confirmation at Christ Church (8 males, 15 females).

1873 -Synod representative: Edwin Rouse.

1873 -Churchwardens: People's, A. R. Tuckwell, R. Gallard; Clergyman's: P. R. J. Brien.

1876 -Easter Sunday. Presentation to Christ Church of a new and valuable service of Communion plate by Mrs. Edwin S. Rouse.

1878 -Nov. 19. Consecration of Christ Church, Rouse Hill, by the Archbishop of Sydney. The chancel, east window, Communion rails, vestry, pulpit and reading desk, organ, carpeting, etc., given by Mrs Rouse at an estimated cost of 400 pounds.

1886 -Churchwardens: Mr. E. Rouse, Mr. J. Withycombe and Mr. J. Wills.

1886 -Sunday School: 33 scholars, 2 teachers.

In November 1934 the Church Treasurer was Miss M. Rumery.

On 21 November 1958, Mr and Mrs Greentree organised a concert at Rouse Hill which was '*successful beyond all expectations*'. Over 50 cars were counted in the church grounds, the hall was more than packed and people looked through the windows and doors.⁶

Also in November the installation of the electric lighting was completed. Rev. Robey noted in the Church paper now called *The Witness* that the next evening service would be held on 23 November, at 7.30 p.m. '*People can enjoy attending the Evening Service without worries about eye strain*'.

In 1970 Mr M. Cathers and Mr Peterson were Wardens at Rouse Hill. The Cathers family were the mainstay of Christ Church during the 1970s, organising the services, (even taking them if necessary) and running the Sunday school. Elizabeth played the organ there, later playing at St Paul's at Riverstone. A Fellowship was operating for the young people and many functions and gatherings were held.

In about 1979 the church was transferred from the parish of Riverstone to Kellyville, under the Rev. Ian Fauchon who held a service there once a month.

However after the Cathers family left the district, attendance declined and the Church was closed. The date of the last service is not known, but most likely it was in the 1980s.

In December 1997, Christ Church Rouse Hill was in a very sorry state. The windows were boarded up and the whole building looked abandoned. There were then no plans to reopen the church. The use of the site will ultimately depend on the rate of development of the area and the overall plans the Diocese is developing for the North West sector.⁷

However, in May 1998 the position has changed. St. Stephen's Church at Kellyville and the land it occupied was sold, with the funds earmarked for a new ministry centre. In the interim Christ Church Rouse Hill is being brought back into use for full time worship with necessary repairs being undertaken on the roof, windows, woodwork, electricals and guttering.⁸

It will be great to see this 135 year old building being used again as a church, continuing the tradition of worship which started so many years ago and for which so many people have worked throughout the years.

¹ National Trust of Aust. Row Hill House Booklet. c1971

² *ROUSE HILL HOUSE AND THE ROUSES* -Caroline Rouse Thornton

³ *A History of the Rumery Family*. Rosemary Phillis

⁴ *Cemetery Transcriptions*. CHRIST CHURCH, ROUSE HILL. Dural & Dist. Hist. Soc

⁵ *The Church News* -St Paul's, Riverstone

⁶ *The Witness* St Paul's, Riverstone

⁷ Letter from St Stephen's Anglican Church, Kellyville. 28 Nov. 1997

⁸ *Hills Shire Times* 19 May 1998