



Michael Groenewegen conducting the choir. Organist Joyce Nichols.



The choir and organist Joyce Nichols.

Photos: Maisie and Jim Gillespie Collection.

Sesquicentenary at Ebenezer Church

Mary Pitt and Maisie Gillespie

In 1974, Ebenezer Uniting Church, formerly Presbyterian, celebrated the 150th anniversary of the first Presbyterian Service of Holy Communion in Australia. The first communion was conducted in Ebenezer Church on Sunday 1 August 1824 by Rev. John Dunmore Lang.¹

Although the Church was established in 1809, the first communion service is not reported to have been held until 1824.²

The choir of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Riverstone were asked to perform at an outdoor service to celebrate the Sesquicentenary. The moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia attended (in colonial attire) and there was a congregation of well over 200. Commemorative communion tokens (made of copper alloy) were given to those in attendance.

The choir was conducted by Michael Groenewegen and musical accompaniment by organist, Joyce Nichols.

The service was televised live, by the ABC, as part of their "Divine Service" series (from 1956-1987). The presentation of "Divine Service" each week (on a Sunday) drew from a variety of denominations in every state and included a number of unusual services such as those from a winery in Tanunda, the Police Training Academy in Melbourne, the sesquicentenary celebrations at Ebenezer.³ It was a very big event for the community in those days.

We were very honoured and things went well. As a result, the ABC also did a radio broadcast of one of our own Church Services at St Andrew's, Riverstone. This was in the old church, before the new extension, so setting up recording equipment in a small weatherboard building was a bit of a challenge at the time.



ABC Cameraman.

Photo: Maisie and Jim Gillespie Collection.

¹ *A History of Ebenezer Church* by Ted Bing.

² <https://www.ebenezerchurch.org.au>

³

<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22publications/tailedpapers/HPP032016009612%22;src1=sml>