

St John's Church of England, Marsden Park

Winsome Phillis

On 2 April 2017 the official launch of a new Life Anglican Church at Marsden Park took place. The congregation presently meets at the Richard Johnson Anglican School Marsden Park Campus. In the future, plans are to build a new church on land in Excelsior Avenue (formerly Vine Street West). In this article we recall the history of the previous Church of England at Marsden Park.

In the year 1899 meetings were being held by the Church of England people in Marsden Park to establish a Church in their area. A donation of land by Mr Claus Witt, of Surrey Hills in 1900 made this possible, and on October 13th, 1909, the historic event of laying the foundation stone of St John's Church took place. The ceremony was performed by Mrs G.G. Kiss of Clydesdale. The new church was on the north western corner of Grange Avenue and Richmond Road.

At this time Marsden Park was linked with the Parish of Castle Hill and the Rev. E.G. Cranswick, was the Rector.

The Church was built by Mr Fred Rothwell who camped on the site whilst doing the job.

Seventy-eight days later, December 30th, the Church held its first service. The cost of the building was approximately £120, which was subscribed within twelve months. The Dedication Service was performed by His Grace, the late Archbishop Wright, this being the first dedication service held by the late Archbishop in Australia. He was assisted by the Rev. E.G. Cranswick, Rector, with Rev. Pitt-Owen as Curate.



"Opening of the new Anglican Church at Grange Farms, opened 30 December 1909 by His Grace Archbishop Wright, with Rev Cranswick from Castle Hill in attendance and Rev Owens from Riverstone." Photo provided by Les Tod from the *Town and Country Journal*, 19 January 1910 p24.

According to the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* of 8 January 1910, the celebrations in relation to the opening ceremony continued on the following Saturday when *A sports gathering was held in the afternoon at which numerous prizes were distributed amongst a large number of competitors. This was followed by a tea meeting and concert which were both largely attended. A sumptuous repast was provided by the ladies, and a good programme was rendered, mostly by local artists.*

On Sunday afternoon, 2nd inst, a special thanksgiving service was conducted by the Rev. R.H. Pitt Owen, when the church, which had been decorated for the occasion, was well filled. A suitable sermon was delivered, and all were very much encouraged to find so many attending. It is expected that in future a service will be held regularly instead of twice a month as heretofore.. Service next Sunday at 3 p.m.



The foundation stone from St John's is presently in the grounds of the Life Anglican Church, Elizabeth Street in Riverstone.

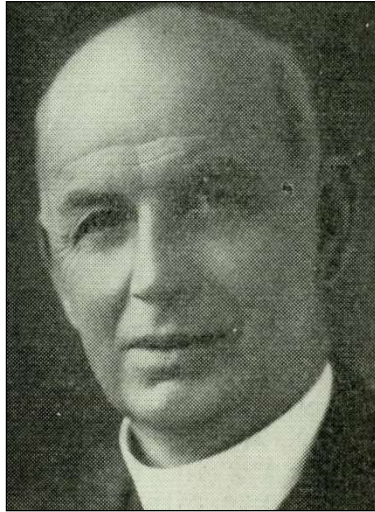
The first wedding held at St John's was that of Alice Bere and Frank Voysey on August 30th, 1910.

Other Marriages included:

Harry Moore & Myra Maud Wood, March 5, 1913.
Charles Jones & Ruby Stubbings. January 15, 1921.
Percy Drayton & Kathleen C. Clarke. August 13, 1921.
Charles Evans & Evelyn Norris. July 29, 1922.
Ernest A.E. Parmeter & Caroline Smith. August 12, 1922.
William A. Morgan & Esther E. Evelyn-Liardet. September 23, 1922.
John W.F.J. Rothwell & Myra E. Mangold. February 24, 1924.
Arthur Glew & Elizabeth Giles. January 11, 1926.
William Watts & Winifred E. Rimmington. August 25, 1928.

Some of the Baptisms:

Ada Locke. February 18, 1917.
Frank Marfield. October 24, 1920.
Nancy Berrell Shrubbs. May 30, 1926.
Gloria Rose Aelison. August 29, 1926.
Thomas Eric Whitehead. December 12, 1926.
Kenneth Robert Voysey. April 17, 1927.
Edward Alan Delafield Gwatkin. August 28, 1927.



Rev. W. J. Owens, the first Rector of St John's.
He was inducted on Thursday evening, May 17, 1928, by the Rev. T. Knox, Acting Rural Dean of Parramatta, as Curate-in-charge of the Provisional District of Riverstone, which included Marsden Park.

Ministers

According to the booklet *Church of St John's Marsden Park 1909-1959*:

For 19 years St. John's Church was linked with the Parish of Castle Hill, and in 1928 application was made for a separate Parish, namely Riverstone, and in that year Rev. W. J. Owens became the first Rector, and he served faithfully for six years, endearing himself to the people with whom he was associated. The Rev. W. R. Brown followed Mr Owens in the capacity of Rector, and was in the Lord's service here for two years. Time marches on, and the Rev. R. R. Hawkins took office from Mr. Brown, and was actively engaged in the work for 15 years. It was in 1952 that the Rev. W. Hayward answered the call to the Parish and laboured diligently here until 1957, when the present Rector, the Rev. H. W. Robey took office.

Rev. H.W. Robey was followed in 1960 by Rev. R.S. Barker and then long serving rector Rev. Cyril Turner who was minister from 1964 – 1976. He was followed by Rev. W. Newton from 1976 to 1984. Rev Newton was the final minister at St John's Marsden Park.

Following are some of the excerpts from the Church newsletters of the time referring to St John's:

Parish News. June 1928.

Churchwardens: Major McClean, Messrs. A. Shields and R. Bere.

Church Committee: Mesdames McClean, Shields, Nairn, Townson, James and Bere, Misses Remington (*possibly should have read Rimmington*) and Griffin.

Parish Council: Major McClean.

Church Secretary: Major F.W.D. McClean.

The Church News.

September 1928.

Women's Guild: President, Mrs McClean: Vice President, Mrs James;

Secretary, Miss Rimmington;

Treasurer, Mrs McClean.

February 1929.

“We give our very hearty thanks to Mrs Pearce for a fine linen cloth, with most beautifully worked lace, for the Communion Table. It is a notable addition to our little Church, not only from its intrinsic value, but from the very large amount of labour that was put into it.”

The Minister’s Report, May 20, 1929 speaks of additions at Marsden Park.

Expenditure. Buildings-Additions and Furnishing. £7.5.6.

Debit:- £50, last instalment on private loan for building.

Mention is made at this point of “special efforts to raise sufficient to pay off the long-standing loan from Mr Buckland, and this has been accomplished.”

December 1931

Church Secretary. Miss N. Griffin.

“Mr Andrew, of Riverstone, has made an excellent job of the alterations to the Church; the pivoting (sic) of the windows and the putting in of the louvers has immensely improved the ventilation. Formerly a summer afternoon in the Church partook of the nature of a penance, for the heat and stuffiness were almost unbearable; since the alterations, these inconveniences have been banished, and one can be at ease inside the Church, however warm it may be outside.”

December 1932.

The Sunday School picnic to be held Saturday, December 10.

Sunday School is held every Sunday at 3.30 pm.

"Mrs Townson, the devoted Superintendent of the Sunday School, makes the long journey from her home Sunday after Sunday, wet or fine, with unfailing regularity."

January 1933.

Report of picnic organized by Mrs Townson. Helpers: Mrs Shields, Mrs Voysey, Mrs and Miss Griffin.

The booklet *The Church of St. John's Marsden Park 1909-1959* recorded that:

At some time in the 50 years after the opening of St John's the church was extended by the construction of the large porch.....

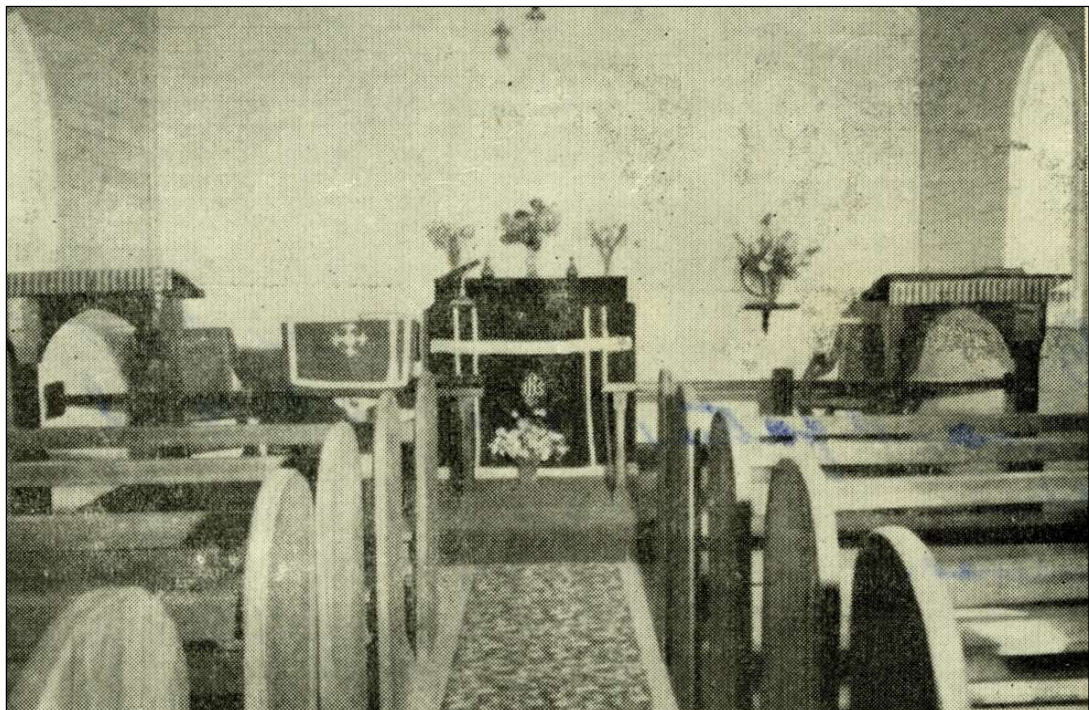


The porch at the front and extension on the back of the church.

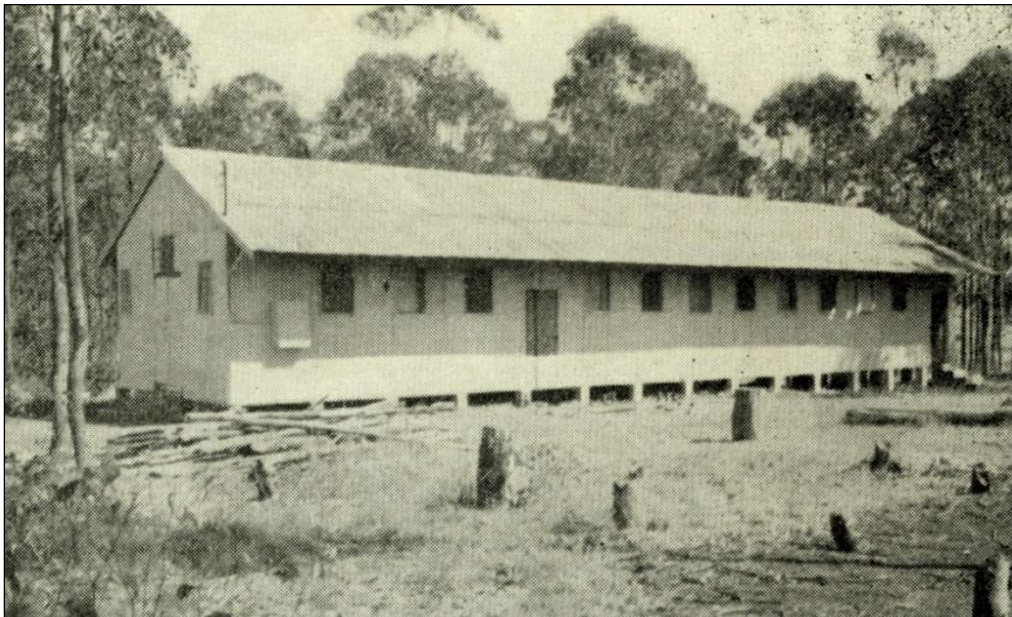
Photo supplied by Les Tod



This photo shows the new porch at the front of the church. A note on the back of the photo says that the young man is the Minister's son. Photo: The Bere family



Interior of St Johns in 1959.
Photo from the *Church of St John's Marsden Park 1909-1959* booklet.



The newly located church hall in 1959.
Photo from the *Church of St John's Marsden Park 1909-1959* booklet.

The Witness.

September 1954. Rev. W.F. Hayward

"An enthusiastic Working Bee of ladies and men has made wonderful improvements to the interior of the church building and to the fences surrounding Church property. For all who are taking part we offer our sincere thanks. Also recorded with appreciation are the donations of ornamental trees by Mr. & Mrs. Cuff and Mr. F. Mangold."

A Car Drive has been planned for 18th September. Destination is Camden-Vale where an inspection of the Rotolactor on a Model Farm has been arranged.

The Church Hall

In 1955, the adjoining block of land was purchased for £150 and plans were made to build a Church Hall. The story was detailed in the booklet *Church of St John's Marsden Park 1909-1959*:

For some years this corner of the Parish has felt strongly the urge for expansion, and in 1955 negotiations for the purchase of the adjoining block of land were put into operation, the sum of £150 being the purchase price, and through appeals to the parishioners and encouragement from our Rector, the said sum was raised immediately. It was in 1958 that the Rector and Wardens decided upon the purchase of an Army Hut. (According the Geoff Follett, the hall was relocated from HMAS NIRIMBA at Quakers Hill.) A site at the rear of the church was cleared, the piers placed in position, and the building erected thereon at a cost of £550. In this year, inspired by the Rector, further voluntary efforts were made by the male members of the Church, and we give thanks to God for the completion of this Sunday School Hall, which will enable us to carry on, still further, the work of his Kingdom at Marsden Park.

The Witness.

December 1958. Rev. H.W. Robey

The painting of St John's is practically completed, and work is continuing on the S.S. Hall.

In November the first birthday of the "Younger Wives" Group was held.

The newly formed Marsden Park Fellowship, under the leadership of Mr. Charles Cuff is gaining in numbers –meeting every Friday evening at the Church.

Guild members held a very successful cake and fancy stall at the local school on polling day.

The 50th Anniversary of the Church was held on the 13th October 1959, and was also marked by the Consecration Ceremony. At this Service a plaque was placed in the Church:

To the Glory of God
in memory of a founder
SABRA ANN BERE
On the fiftieth anniversary of the
ST. JOHNS CHURCH
FLUORESCENT LIGHTING PRESENTED
BY
HER FAMILY
13th OCTOBER, 1959



1959 Consecration of the church hall.

Photo supplied by Les Tod



Church Committee Members

Back Row (L. to R.): W. Carr, H. Cuff, The Rev H. Robey, F. Norris, E. Bennett.

Front Row (L. to R.): Mesdames Voysey, E. Norris, F Norris, Cuff, Sutton, Huckin, Norris Snr.
Photo: Riverstone and District Historical Society Inc

The Church of St John's Marsden Park 1909-1959 booklet also detailed some of the workers who were not available to be photographed:

In addition to those members of the working teams attached to St. John's Marsden Park, there are the following who were not available to be photographed.

Church Warden and Sunday School Superintendent. Mr. N. Bodenham.

Church Committee: Mrs Whiting, Mrs Bodenham and Mr Follett.

Ladies Guild: Mrs Bodenham, Mrs Carr, Mrs Whiting.



1959 Consecration of the church hall. The photo shows some of the locals attending the service.
Photo: Riverstone and District Historical Society Inc

The Witness.

December-January 1961-62. Rev. R.S. Barker

Combined Christmas Party to be held on Tuesday 12 December at the Sunday School Hall.
A street stall will be held adjacent to the Polling booth at the School.

September 1963

Annual Medical Mission service held in August. Speaker Mr. Reg Roberts from North India.
Many items were brought along to be sent to North Australian Mission Stations.

Notes from the Minute Book of the Ladies Guild. Marsden Park. 1958 - 1963

A meeting was convened for the purpose of forming a Ladies Guild on May 12, 1958 at the home of Mrs Cuff. Those present at this first meeting were – Mrs Watts, Mrs F. Wells, Mrs F. Norris, Mrs E. Norris, Mrs Norris Snr., Mrs Sutton, Mrs Huckins, Mrs Walkly, Mrs Dwyer, Mrs W. Carr, Mrs Cuff, Mrs Whiting, Mrs Bodenham.



The Ladies Guild

Back Row (L. to R.): Mesdames Henderson, Huckin, Heath, Bray, Wells, Sutton, F. Norris.

Front Row (L. to R.): Mesdames Voysey, Follett, E. Norris, Cuff, Watts, Shields, Norris Snr.

Photo: Riverstone and District Historical Society Inc

This Minute Book covers the meetings from May 12, 1958 to March 13, 1963.

The Guild arranged catering for local parties, Men's dinners, Fetes, cake stalls etc., as well as organizing the Flower Roster and the Church Cleaning Roster.

Sunday School was held regularly. Mrs Norris and her daughter Margaret ran it for some time. Wayne Olsen was a teacher.

On May 7, 1960, a letter of thanks was forwarded to Mr Flint of the Meat Works for the donation of smallgoods for a Tea Meeting.

In 1969 a Diamond Jubilee Anniversary service was held. Many functions were held in the Hall. Sometimes big dinners were held there. Minnie Humphreys would do the catering, up to 130 place settings would be hired.

Services in the Church were discontinued toward the end of 1977, due to the unsafe condition of the Church building. The building was demolished in 1979 and in 1980 the land was sold.

After the Church was closed, the Foundation Stone was brought in to St Paul's Church at Riverstone. It is presently located behind the Church Hall and it is hoped that it can be relocated to Marsden Park when the new church is built.

Until recently the site operated as Parklea Plant and Pots and the church hall was used as their indoor display centre and office. The site is now vacant, awaiting the next stage of development in the Marsden Park area.