

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

R O X B U R G H

Roxburgh's church of Our Lady of Peace was blessed and opened in the year our New Zealand Health Camps were started : 1919; 75 years ago. It is customary for the Bishop to officiate at church openings but Bishop Michael Verdon had died of the great 'flu on 18th November, 1918. So the Foundation Stone reads:

"This stone of this church in honour of the Most Holy Trinity under the invocation of Mary Queen of Peace, which was begun under the episcopate of Michael, Bishop of Dunedin, was placed and blessed while the See was vacant, by the Administrator of the Diocese, James Coffey, on the feast of Mary Immaculate (8th December) 1918"

As Bishop James Whyte was not appointed until late in 1920, Fr Coffey returned to bless and open the church on 14th September, 1919.

HOW THE CHURCH CAME TO BE BUILT

Roxburgh had been a Mission Station served from Lawrence since the town was established in the days of the gold rush. On 30th November, 1916, the parish priest, Monsignor Patrick O'Leary, died in Lawrence having been in charge of the whole area for 34 years. Soon after, parishioners of Roxburgh and Millers Plat met and sent a request to Bishop Verdon that their territory be constituted a parish in its own right. The Bishop agreed and in January appointed Fr William Corcoran as Roxburgh's first parish priest.

On Sunday, 20th May, the congregation decided to build a presbytery and to that end would hold a bazaar and run an art union as a start to the fund raising. The secretary of the committee was John Harry Waigh.

Only a few months later the Bishop transferred Fr Corcoran to Gore and Fr Daniel O'Neill, a curate at South Dunedin, to Roxburgh. Soon after his arrival he requested the fund-raising committee to change its target -- to build a church instead of a presbytery, and to this they agreed. The church then in use was the Chapel of St Mary which had been built in 1869 and had been extended in 1892. It stood on the same corner section where it had been built, although some maintain that it had been originally built in Roxburgh East and shifted later.

Events moved quickly; the whole parish being vitally involved the fund-raising was successful. Fr O'Neill was as busy as anyone else. A story has it that on visits to the seminary he obtained from students the names and addresses of friends and relatives. "He had a way with him, you know." To these people he sent art union tickets, ingenuously giving the names of those who had given him the addresses. At the opening he was able to say that people from all over the country had helped the cause! Mr Harry Mandeno of Dunedin drew up plans; tenders were called and the contract won by Mr Daniel Boyd.

During all this planning stage, the Great War was still being battled out; families had sons on active service. Little wonder that the new church project was linked with prayer for world peace. Fund-raising became a prayer for peace. The Armistice came a month before the laying of the Foundation Stone but in a sense the Patroness's name was already on the church.

WHAT A DAY THAT WAS

The opening was quite a notable event and a good record has been preserved for us. The Otago Daily Times report says, "The building was designed to accommodate 175 people ... but there must have been about 200 on the floor of the church on Sunday". (Obviously a very large crowd but they might have been very thin people.) The whole parish along with Lawrence, the mother parish, rejoiced. One family in particular, the Ted Faheys from Evans Flat, near Lawrence have a story of their own about the day. They had driven up in their own open tourer motor car and parked it near the church. The Joe Murphys, from a Roxburgh farm, tethered their horse alongside. Somehow, the horse managed to stretch its lead, put in its head and eat the family's lunch which had been left in a basket on the front seat of the car. The Faheys dined well as guests of the Murphys that day.

(ODT, 24-9-19) "After the blessing of the church, Solemn High Mass was sung, Rev Fr Collins being celebrant, Fr Morkane, deacon and Fr O'Neill sub-deacon. The music of the dedication ceremony and High Mass was beautifully rendered by the choir under the leadership of Mr J. H. Waigh. The occasional sermon was preached by Fr Morkane. In the evening Vespers and Benediction, the sermon being preached by Fr O'Donnell of Gore."

Sometime later there was a pleasant little meeting held in the choir loft. The singing for the church opening had been right up to concert pitch and the choir members showed their appreciation to the organist, Miss Tottie McMullin, for all the skill and work she had devoted to their practice and presented her with a crucifix as an expression of their thanks.

Besides these official services that comprised the joyous day's programme, there was an unofficial event. The baptism register shows that on that very day, 14-9-19, Timothy Dunlay and his wife Mary (neé Waigh) brought their nine-day old daughter Ellen Jean, to be baptised by Fr O'Neill with Charles Waigh and Mary Dunlay as godparents.

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A TOUR OF THE CHURCH

A church is for the worship of God. Everything about a church serves that purpose and is a lesson for us. One of the foremost sacred items of furniture is the baptismal font, whence we are born to eternal life. Apart from hearing that ours was New Zealand made and was bought by Fr Welsh in the early 50s we have nothing to report, alas. Before that, the large sea shell (now at the door for holy water) served as font for baptisms.

A L T A R

The altar of sacrifice, presented by the Woodhouse family, is especially noteworthy, quite an ambitious art piece for a small church. It was constructed by J. Tait of Christchurch from designs by the church's architect, H. Mandeno. Most of it is white Carrara marble which is relieved by mottled red panels and columns of green New Zealand serpentine. Altogether it has a solid orthodox simplicity about it that tells that it is just for the Glory of God.

One item of the altar did not survive the liturgical change syndrome after the Vatican Council--the canopy that stood on top of the Tabernacle capping the unit. What ever became of it?

The altar is not now used for Mass. Since the liturgy reforms, Mass is now celebrated on the fairly plain wooden altar closer to the congregation.

C A L V A R Y

Against the back wall of the sanctuary and high above the altar stands the crucifix. It was made by Sister Mary Lawrence of Wellington and presented to the church by John Harry Waigh, who at the time was Mayor of Roxburgh. It arrived in October, 1950 and before it could be put up, Mr Waigh died suddenly on 22nd. This gift was only one of many claims to our grateful remembrance of Harry Waigh. He had been parish secretary for 25 years, choirmaster for 47 years and it was he who had been secretary for the fund-raising committee when the church was built, and earlier that year when the presbytery was built.

So there the cross hung against the plain bare wall of the sanctuary, visually very striking, but something was missing.

About 1953, Frederick Vincent Ellis began visiting this district to stay with his brother-in-law, Neil Bunbury of Roxburgh East. F.V. Ellis was a prayerful and special artist. His natural talents in art had been well trained in several European art centres including Paris and Florence. Though not very well known, he has made quite a contribution to art in New Zealand: it was he who brought the art of stained glass making to Dunedin having trained Mr Miller of Miller's Studio; later he was Director of the Wellington School of Art.

When he went into the church and saw the crucifix, the space around the figure of Christ called out to the artist within him. He reflected on the gospel accounts of the crucifixion: "there were people there from among his family and friends even if apostles were missing" as in Luke chapter 23, v 47 - 49, and John c 19, v 25 - 27.

So in the mural he has painted a meditation tableau that imparts deeper devotional power than the crucifix does on its own. Mary is supported by her friends; quiet grief is there, accepted but not despair; proportion is kept and the group does not dominate the scene. The moment of redemption is frozen before us; a scene on the edge of the real world signified by the angels. Here is Christian Faith, hope and love.

A few years ago, the painting was touched up by local artist, Tim Mitchell.

THE BUNBURY WINDOW

The church is fortunate to have also a sample of Ellis' stained glass work: the Bunbury window, for his wife's family. You may have missed it going through the porch into the church but when it catches your eye as you go out be sure to examine it, on the north wall of the porch, a simple but devotional head and shoulders picture of Mary, with eyes closed as in recollection, peace. Around her head is written "Our Lady of Peace", beneath, "Pray for the Bunbury family", and, in white, the Holy Spirit as dove, peace of heart.

The lead-light circular picture window is only 500mm in diameter but it is fixed in a larger window of colour-frosted rectangular panes. Go closer and read what is inscribed: Design: F.V. Ellis, A R C A (London); Execution: O.G. Miller & Sons, Dunedin.

SOMETHING NEW

The church is voted a resounding success -- the modern "Technics" Digital Piano replacing a bellows harmonium. Since it was bought in 1992 it has been used constantly and the strong singing at Mass bears witness that the congregation is as thrilled to hear it as the organist, Mrs Rosemary Kelly, Q S M, is to play it.

On Tour (Contd.)

Church bells have strong Christian connotations. We are glad that Our Lady of Peace can boast of having and using bells. They sound out by way of recordings played through a loudspeaker in a belfry set on the west-end gable peak of the roof ridge. The system was presented to the church in 1955 by Mrs Sarah Laloli and Frank, her son. They are played before Sunday Mass and any other major services.

The STATUE OF OUR LADY

The last "Marian Year", which we celebrated under the leadership of Pope John Paul in 1987/88, has a permanent remembrance with us. A statue of Our Lady had originally stood inside the church but had been damaged. Thanks to the generosity of the Roxburgh branch of the Catholic Women's League, it was able to be restored by Tim Mitchell. A niche waited for it; a niche for a statue had been fixed in the west facade of the church when it was built. Now, after standing vacant for 68 years, it was finally occupied in November, 1987. Holding the statue and balanced on top of a pile of 11 pallets on a forklift driven by Peter van Gameren, Brian and Blair McLean took it aloft and fixed it solidly in the niche. It may have been something of a circus act at the time but as we glance up at Our Lady Mary we are grateful to them for the reminder to pray for peace of heart.

The CHURCH GROUNDS

Although some say that the church built in 1869 was sited in Roxburgh East, it seems more likely that the only land the Church acquired in Roxburgh last century was on the corner of Scotland and Liddle streets. Officially it is described as sections 7 & 9, of Block XII of Roxburgh Township. When the church was built the land had not been formally possessed; it was obtained first as a Crown Grant by James Woodhouse only in January, 1870.

By a deed of 12 July, 1890, the said James Woodhouse, Licensed Victualler, sold it to Most Reverend Patrick Moran, Doctor of Divinity and Bishop of the Diocese of Dunedin in consideration of the sum of 10/- (ten shillings) in the hand, to be held in trust for the religious and educational requirements of the said Diocese. The witnesses who set their hands to this document were John Harry Waigh, miner, of Roxburgh and James Woodhouse, farmer, of Teviot.

There is a photo of the new and old churches standing side by side and just when the wooden one was sold to Mr Stevenson of Dumbarton and shifted there, where it still stands, we do not know.

Among old papers that have survived is an invoice and receipt for trees bought by the Catholic Church in September 1938 from Brian M. Jeffery of the Roxburgh Hardy Plant Nurseries. Ten trees are listed, costing £1-10-0, and a cotoneasta is named, and an azara and a kowhai. Specimens of these trees in the grounds are presumably the very ones bought in 1938.

The MADRONE

A few weeks after the presbytery was opened on 27-8-50, Mayor Harry Waigh planted a madrone tree (short for Arbutus Menziesii Madrona). It would be interesting to know just why it was chosen or where it came from. It is notoriously difficult to transplant out so it is a rare and precious tree in these parts and of special interest to tree lovers. However, care and conditions here must have been just the best; it thrived and came to be greatly admired, with its dark, ever-green leaves and reddish-brown bark that peels off in thin flakes. It stood at about where the front of the old church had been.

Perhaps it thrived too well: in only 40 years it grew higher than the church and spread out to cover more than 11 metres. In winter's frosty mornings it blocked out the sunshine from the church and in the afternoons shaded the presbytery. After months of debate in the Parish Council a decision was reluctantly taken to cut it down. Norman Marsh was employed for the job which with the help of several parishioners he completed in three hours. But it made Saturday 10th August, 1991 a sad day.

The MAGNOLIA

Among the shops in the main street just past the Grand and going towards the school was one that had been a bakery and was later converted into offices, that was set back from the street line. In front of it grew a large old magnolia tree. With the Hydro Dam construction bringing more people about in the early 50s, this building was going to be extended forward to the street as a shop. So — what to do with the magnificent magnolia?

'Tis said that Brian Jeffery was entrusted to remove it and with the co-operation of his friend, Fr Welsh found a home for it, happily, in our grounds. It was an ambitious undertaking considering its age and size; it required a high crane to lift and transport it but the job was skilfully done and the magnolia took and grew. In recent times it

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The CHURCH GROUNDS: Magnolia (contd)

faded somewhat. Now however, it has got a new lease of life and though not nearly as big as it was 40 years ago, it is growing well.

More trees

For the record — In 1987, Fr Brian F nton planted some trees to add to the variety as well as to decorate the grounds. Four are by the daffodils, two at the front end of the church and two cherry blossoms on the south side. A kowhai with the cherry blossoms comes from Bill Welnoski's garden.

The DAFFODILS

Harry Waigth was a keen gardener and his extensive house garden west of Melrose street was a show piece. He employed a gardener, by name Wattie Stewart, a Scot. Along the roadline of Melrose street was a great display of daffodils. In 1935, they lifted and divided the bulbs and planted out hundreds in the church grounds in the shade of the Town Hall. Although they comprise only two varieties — in plain terms, the large old yellow daffodil and the pheasant eye — they make a very pleasing scene in spring.

This year, the bulbs have again been lifted and divided, only the second time in 60 years. At the same time, a bed of some modern varieties has been established on the higher ground. If this work looks well and the general tidiness and order of the grounds at present is adverted to, we are indebted to Jim Gornley and the Time and T L C he bestows on them.

The LOURDES GROTTTO

Very little seems to have been recorded or remembered about it.: The general idea of a rock wall grotto comes from the appearances of Our Lady in 1858 in Lourdes, in the French Pyrenees. (Remember the book and the film "The Song of Bernadette"?) Bernadette saw her standing on a ledge of a rock wall, as if in a niche. Grottos now generally try to copy that setting.

Here, all we can find so far is that our grotto seems to have been constructed about 1954 by a Mr Cahill, an Irishman working at the Hydro, from rock and stones from the river. However, the matter is uncertain. Perhaps some day some one may be able to shed light on the problem for us.

Peeping shyly around the side of the grotto is "Softly", a white camellia. It was donated by John and Ruth Christiansen and planted on 17th October, 1993 by Gladys Waigth, Eileen McMahon and Mary Varcoe with Fr Michael O'Neil of Seattle, U.S.A. It commemorates "Heritage", the centenary of Women's suffrage in New Zealand.

With the shrine inside the church — Our Lady of Perpetual Succour — we are on surer ground. It was made at Fr Welsh's request by Len Belcher, an Englishman, engineer with Cubitts, Zschokke & Downer on the Hydro Dam construction. He and his wife Joan (from Skibbereen) were out here early in 1990 and visited Roxburgh and Our Lady of Peace. From their home in Stamford, Lincolnshire, they see pilgrims making their way to the ancient and famous shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

FR DANIEL A. O'NEILL

The parish priest involved with the building of Our Lady of Peace deserves to be remembered when the jubilee is on. Although Fr Dan O'Neill was one of our first locally born priests, not very much is known about him.

He was the youngest son of Police Sargeant Patrick O'Neill and Ellen (nee Brady) and was baptised in Dunedin on 23 October, 1881. For training for priesthood, Bishop Verdon sent him to Manly seminary, Australia, first and for theology to the Irish College in Rome, where he was ordained.

When he was returning home in 1905, an Italian Shipping Line needed a chaplain for its run to Australia. The new priest, fluent in Italian, was appointed, even fitted out with special uniform and earned his passage.

Before Roxburgh, he served God's people in Gore, Invercargill and then South Dunedin. While there, he was confessor to the seminarians at Mosgiel. He was said to have a pleasant and happy disposition and endeared himself to priests and people alike.

In 1922 he was transferred to Riversdale (replacing his brother, Fr Pat) and died there on 13th May, 1924, when the presbytery was burnt down during the night and he was unable to escape the blaze. From childhood he had been partially crippled and walked with a limp and this may have impeded his efforts to escape. He was buried from St Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin.