

A Brief History of the Parish of Collingwood

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The first Anglican Church Building in Collingwood was erected in 1855 when it was still part of the Parish of St Mark's Fitzroy. It was a small stone school classroom known as Christ Church Hall "near the Collingwood baths". This was on the corner of present day Nicholson St and Marine Pde. The foundation stone was laid on 3rd November 1855, and a schoolmaster was appointed.

Presumably the first classes were held in a temporary building because it had been operating as a non-vested Denominational School from September 1855. In 1858 its average attendance was 101 pupils.

In 1863 it became common school No 5 and lasted until 1882. Because it was a denominational school, it did not receive Government funding. This meant that it could also be used for religious services. The first such service was held on the 27th June 1858 by a clergyman. In the main though, the services were conducted by a layman.

Between 1858 and 1862 services were held in the schoolroom "near the Collingwood baths". These were conducted by a layman, Nathaniel Kinsman, who was a Fitzroy second-hand furniture dealer. When the Church of England decided to appoint an ordained minister to East Collingwood in 1862, Kinsman and his congregation objected to the appointment. They seceded and erected a church nearby. According to census reports there were 111 members of this new congregation in 1871 and about half that number ten years later.

On 27th March 1863, Sir William Stawell, Chief Justice, chaired a community meeting to form a new church to replace Christ Church Hall. Land was bought for six hundred pounds, plans were approved, and tenders accepted. The foundation stone of St Philip's church was laid by Governor Darling on 29th December 1863. The first service was held on 20th April 1865. Two years later in August 1867, the church was consecrated.

A century later, in October 1968, this bluestone church was summarily demolished, to make way for an "interdenominational centre". Pleas by the National Trust to preserve the building for its historical value were ignored and a year of negotiation with Bishop Sambell failed. The "interdenominational centre" was never built. Instead, the land was compulsorily acquired by the then Collingwood City Council after a long legal battle with the Diocese of Melbourne and is now parkland. It is

now, only thirty-six years later, that the mistakes of the past are being undone, and that the building in which we now sit stands as a symbol to the resilience of the people of Collingwood and of the hopes and dreams of a new generation.

It stands on the site of the old Sunday School Hall where, for the first 50 years of Anglican ministry in Collingwood, there as an old building known as the Iron Pot. Prior to the building works for the new building commenced, an archaeological dig led by a team from La Trobe University attempted to find remnants of this old building. It started its life as a prefabricated church, on the Hobson's Bay foreshore (Williamstown). Originally commissioned by Bishop Perry, first Bishop of Melbourne and the Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the building was first erected from iron cladding on a timber framework and consecrated in Bristol, England. It was then dismantled and shipped to Melbourne in packing crates but without accompanying plans. The only guidance to its construction was the Illustrated London News of 30th April, 1853. Cold in winter and hot in summer, this building was quickly replaced in Williamstown and the "Iron Pot" was transported to its final site in Collingwood in 1875. It was used as the parish hall and Sunday School room until 1918 when a new Gothic style building replaced it.

After the demolition of the old church on the other side of the rectory, this Gothic-style hall was used also as the worship centre and church. In 1984, this building was destroyed by fire, leaving the buildings at the back (a kindergarten) the only buildings left standing on the site. For a time the parish worshipped in a room built at the back of the rectory, but more recently in one of the spaces which came to be known as the "chapel space" north side of the now-restored church hall. Eleven months ago, almost to the day, the parish worshipped in this space for the last time.

There have been several attempts to rebuild the church from the mistakes of the 1960s and the tragedy of the fire in 1984. One attempt saw a plan more in keeping with the traditional look of the old church, allocating space for an old grandfather Fincham organ donated to the parish when a church in Punt Road was demolished. Unfortunately this plan did not come to fruition, and in 1999 the current building program was commenced.

From the beginning it was to incorporate a worship centre seating upwards of 100 people, incorporating as integral to the design a significant work of stained glass art. In addition, the old hall was to be restored, along with the rectory —the oldest building remaining in the Parish of Collingwood still owned by the Melbourne Anglican Trust Corporation. (It was built in 1866 and the architect was John

Flanagan. It is said that the garden was laid out by patients from the Yarra Bend Asylum.) Cost overruns and legal difficulties meant that a much longer time has elapsed between the start of the program and the dedication of the newly-built church.

There is still work to be done: the old rectory has still to be restored, and plans are well underway to bring this part of the project to fruition; the stained glass window, designed by Christopher John Bingley, will be in place by early in 2006; and new offices, hall spaces and commercial kitchen are being readied for new roles so that this place may be a place of welcome, celebration and care for all.

We are fortunate to have an excellent photographic record of the old bluestone church which stood on between the rectory and the Collingwood Town Hall for over 100 years. This photographic record has been made available to St Philip's thanks to Elizabeth Danne, the daughter-in-law of a former vicar; Mrs Jean Hales, a long time parishioner; the Collingwood Historical Society and the State Library of Victoria. Some of these photographs are available online at the respective websites of the last named organizations. Some are also on the parish website.

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~angcoll>. A digital photographic record of the current building project is also available on CD (available at nominal cost on request) as well as on the website. Information about the stained glass windows, especially the suite of boxed windows for which we are seeking funds by public subscription, are also available in a brochure in the foyer, as well as on the website.

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