

A short history of St James' Anglican Church, Mount Isa.

(This history is partly taken from "My Memories", by Morva Power and published in Light Through the Years, A brief history of the Christian Church in Mount Isa, 1923 – 1998)

1924 – The Bush Brothers

“At length, without untoward incident, we arrived at our destination. The scene that met our eye was of spinifex ridges intersected by the dry bed of the tree-lined River Leichhardt. On the town site stood only one building, a bough shed structure, the temporary home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Boyd, who very hospitably entertained us at lunch. Then came the auction sale; held in the open, and conducted by the Mining Warden, Mr. Tregear; S.M.. (Brother) Frank had picked a block opposite the State School site as suitable for the church, but we had to wait a long time before it came up for auction. As a new chum, the October sun seemed excessively hot to me and the protracted bidding for such valuable lots as the two hotels a wearisome business. At last our turn came, and we were fortunate to obtain the chosen block at the upset price of 50 pounds.”

Such are the memories of Brother Cyril Brown B.S.B., only just arrived from England to accompany fellow “Bush Brother” Frank Ford on a trip from Cloncurry in 1924 to purchase a lease for the first Church of England in Mount Isa. He speaks fondly of the trip in a model T Ford named *Ermytrude*, of passing an abandoned Cobb & Co coach at Duchess and camels roaming at what afterwards became my home, Bushy Park.

In 1902 the Rev'd Aneurin Williams was the first representative of the Brotherhood of St. Barnabas in the remote regions of the diocese of North Queensland. By 1909, the brotherhood was established in Cloncurry and provided services in Mt. Isa from 1924 until 1930. In that year, the first church building, already dedicated to St James was relocated from Selwyn to the block in Miles Street that Brothers Brown and Ford purchased six years earlier. St James had arrived.

1930 – Our own building and priest

Parish records show the brothers were kept busy in the growing community. The first wedding in the parish church occurred on 13 March 1930, joining Cyril Zelke (aged 21) and Myra Ferris (19) in Holy Matrimony. It is interesting to note that there were more marriages conducted in 1931 (14) than there were in 1997 (13).

I particularly remember Bro. Crowe who, with the help of Mrs. R. Johnson, prepared a number of us for confirmation in 1945. Bishop Feetham travelled west to confirm us. That same year, a new site in Railway Avenue (then Station Street) was acquired and our little church moved across the river to the then more central position it still holds today.

1948 – Flower Shows & Fetes

The very English Bro. Bradford, who always seemed a trifle overawed by the vastness of our country, arrived in 1948. During his time the two-day Church Fete and Flower Show held at Kruttschnitt Oval was established. It was then a major social event for the town and the church. All church stalwarts worked throughout the year to ensure its success. After about 10 years, it was reduced to one day and relocated to the church grounds.

Time spent in China helped Bro. Archie Briggs, who arrived in 1953, to adapt to our unique, as he termed it, way of living. The town was growing and a curate was required. Rev. David Williams was our first Deacon. Brother Briggs rallied support from MIM and the town and in 1957 the Cross of Witness (known now as the Cross on the Hill) was erected. To this day it stands sentinel on a hill overlooking the town. With the help of community organisations, electricity and floodlighting were added in 2001

In 1953, parish collections, including the Sunday school, amounted to (Pounds) 242.18.1, whilst the profit from the annual show was (Pounds) 113.8.4. Concern was expressed by the treasurer that the flower show money had to be used to support the parish and was not put in the building fund as it was in 1951. (Pounds) 195.13.6 was paid to the Brotherhood of St. Barnabas for “Stipend and Easter Collection”.

1954 – Buildings at Railway Avenue (Station St.)

In 1954 a rectory was erected in the grounds and plans were afoot for a new church building. To provide room, our beloved little church once more picked up its stumps and moved - this time to Soldiers Hill, emerging there as St. Oswald's, where it remained for several years before being sold for removal. Bishop Shevill laid the foundation stone for the new St. James in May 1957 and the building was completed and dedicated by the Bishop on December 8th the same year. It was so modern then with its imposing bell tower and, though we all rejoiced in our new church building, we treasure fond memories of the old wood building we had grown up with.

Father Peter Mayhew joined us as the first “Archdeacon of the West” when Br. Briggs, our last Bush Brother, left for Borneo in 1958, ending 34 years of ministry by the Brotherhood in our town. The brothers had served with dedication. There was still one brother based in the uranium mining town of Mary Kathleen. He visited us station folk for a time, but as time marched on, Mary Kathleen closed and our region farewelled the Bush Brothers - the Brotherhood of St. Barnabas.

1959 – Big Dreams - A Grammar School in the West

In 1959 expansion was in the air and 10 acres of land in Clarke Street was acquired, *with plans even for a Grammar School!* We had a number of firsts in 1960. A branch of the Mothers Union was formed, with Judy Challenor as president. A house for the curate was purchased in Leila Street and the first of our clergy to be married in Mt. Isa, Revd Robert Philp, took up residence with his bride, Jocelyn.

Fr. Mayhew left for London in 1963, to be replaced by Rev. Bernard Tringham and he by Fr. David Scott-Halliday in 1965, who guided us through the dark strike torn days. Revs. Ted Steele and F Stien were curates in 1962-67 and in 1967, our first Church Army officer, Captain Brian Rawlings put in a valuable year helping with the younger folk.

1967 – The dream fulfilled in part - St. Lukes

In the same year, with the population threatening to reach 40,000, St. Luke’s was established in Clarke Street with the help of the **Bush Church Aid Society**. The first minister, Rev’d Bill Jobling, conducted his first service on Easter Day in Camooweal. At St. James, a new curate appointed in 1968. Rev. Ron Wood continued Capt. Rawling’s work with the young. Ron became friend and confidante to many and with his wife Lorraine holds special places in our hearts. Ron was followed by Rev. Hartley Hansford in 1972, who ably assisted the rector Fr. Hampson in tireless work with the needy and in a long association with Alcoholics Anonymous.

A 1969 report in the North West Star showed that our fetes were still popular. Over 200 hundred people attended and \$1,700 was raised. A display of Archdeacon Hampson’s books, including a 1680 edition of “The Compleat Servant-maid or, The Young Maiden’s Tutor” drew particular interest, together with a 1779 volume of Wesley’s Hymns. 13 trophies were donated by Mt. Isa businesses and the Mt. Isa City Band provided music.

Fr. David Philp maintained enthusiasm for fundraising when he became Archdeacon in 1974 and St. Luke’s, who had been worshipping in a relocated store room for six years, built a more permanent home in that year with the help of mines apprentices.

1978 – Ordinations galore

Father John Payne’s time as rector from 1978 heralded a rash of ordinations, with Lindsay Bond as priest and Dal Wright with Ian Trainor as deacons. Ian was ordained priest and Graham Moran made deacon in 1981 and priested the following year. Meanwhile Fr. Gerald Greaves and David Harvey-Sutton covered for Fr. Payne who had taken long service leave. From late in 1981, Fr. Don Barter served as Archdeacon for nearly six years before handing on to Fr. John Emerson whose enthusiasm for stained glass began the fine collection of windows now in the church. Fr. John was, because of diocesan restructuring, our last Archdeacon.

Rev’d Don Ford’s time as rector (1990-1993) heralded a revival of the youth ministry, with his own children providing a sound base. Rev’d Rex Marre, began with his wife Christina early in 1993 and led us into the 21st century, before leaving to take up the position of Rector, St. Mary’s in Bardon (Brisbane Diocese) in February 2001. The parish was vacant in 2002 & 2003. The Rev’d Betty Handley become Locum in a part time caretaker’s role until 2004 when Fr Chris Yule arrived and began to stimulate the parish in Hospital and Parish Visitation, extended lay participation in various areas of the parish up until his departure in mid September 2006 to take up the position Rector Holy Trinity Mackay. Rev’d Simon Hattrell, arrived in February 2007 from the southernmost parish in Australia, Franklin/Esperance in the Huon Valley south of Hobart.

1996 – Back to one (parish)

The population growth which heralded St. Luke’s didn’t happen. Three rectors served from 1967 to 1976, but after then a full time priest could not be supported and ordained ministry was provided from St. James. In 1996 a special meeting of the parishes decided to close St. Luke’s and rename the combined parish “St. James and St. Luke”. St. Luke’s is now the very pleasant Courtyard Function Room, run by the Laura Johnson Home.

We are quietly proud of the contribution made over the many years the Anglican Church has served Mt. Isa. The Bible says the Church is a family. As such, Anglicans have many distant relatives and these, with the faithful, have been blessed through the rites of passage; Baptism, Marriage and Burial. We offer the same today, together with worship and pastoral ministry to the faithful and regular support at the Laura Johnson Nursing Home (both Hostel and Hospice residents) and visitation to the Mount Isa Base Hospital. We are grateful for the mobility of the Patrol Padres of the Uniting Church (Cloncurry) and Salvation Army (Mount Isa) who carry the bulk of pastoral work to the cattle stations.

In 2007 the parish has adopted as an interim Mission Statement *Serving Jesus Christ and this community since 1924*. This statement very much reflects the strong spirit of selfless service to the cause of Christ and the community embodied by the Bush Brothers and those who have followed in their footsteps.

For a number of years the parish ministered in the mining township of Gunpowder (closed 1998). The ministry to the border town of Camooweal (200kms north west) was commenced before Mount Isa was established and has continued intermittently. In 2001, when BCA were unable to continue their support of the Southern Gulf (of Carpentaria) Parish, we accepted responsibility for ministry in Normanton and Karumba (500kms and 577kms respectively to the north). This ministry has ceased and is now covered by the Northern Region based around Cairns.

Church Attendance

The major employer in the city, Mount Isa Mines Limited (now owned by Xstrata), has reduced its workforce from around 5,200 in the 1980's to around 3000 today to meet the challenge of reducing base metal prices and this has had a significant affect on the population as well as the economy of Mount Isa. Outlying mines which were previously resourced from Mount Isa have resorted to "Fly in/Fly out" of employees, with the consequence that the North West region has not benefited from the opening of new mines in the same way as 20 or 30 years ago. The "Fly in / Fly Out" is continually under review and has seen a upsurge in workers moving to Mount Isa and the surrounding area to the extent there is a scarcity of housing available for purchase or rental.

Alpha

In 2001, we reintroduced the Alpha programme. The latest course to be offered in the parish was in 2007 at the local RSL club in their conference room, Rev'd Simon Hattrell being a member and a returned serviceman.

The Future

Ministry in the outback always amounts to a challenge. In mining towns this seems to be doubly so, with many coming to areas like Mount Isa for reasons other than to find God. Church participation across the breadth of the Christian Churches, approximates about half of the national average.

In May 2007 St James Parish, Mount Isa marked the 50th anniversary (a jubilee) of the laying of the foundation stone at St James' church by Bishop Ian Shevill. In December the parish also celebrated 50 years of worship and service to the community in their current building. This was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the grace of God extended to so many families and individuals in the community during this period. Many parishioners remembered with gratitude all those, both Clergy and Laity, Bush Brothers and BCA Missioners at St Luke's, Townview, all dedicated folk, who maintained a Christian witness during the ups and downs of parish life. We are building on the foundation that they laid.

Diana Lister and Barbara Fisher shared some of their personal memories of Brother Archie Briggs, Priest and Bush Brother at the time of the construction of the current building.

On Sunday May the 20th 2007 Reverend Simon Hattrell reflected on facing the challenges of the future, while at the same time drawing on a rich spiritual heritage from our past.

"One of the seven marks of a healthy church that Canon Robert Warren discovered in his work with churches in the Durham diocese in the UK is that such a Christian community:

"...faces the cost of change and growth"and a sub indicator of that mark is that the churches that were growing "while embracing the past, dared to take on new ways of doing things".

I love that sentence because it embodies and encapsulates the dynamic tension of facing the inevitability of change- something that none of us can escape- from the moment we were born into this world. Some of us, of a certain age, are on that slippery slope, where we are constantly reminded of those things over which we seem to have no control!

I said in a recent bulletin that this celebration today is a "wonderful opportunity to reflect on a rich past, while at the same time looking to the future with renewed hope"

David Ford, the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University has said that "Our calling is to improvise in ways that surprise and delight and yet ring true with the past".

*A good friend of mine, author and Pastor, Gerard Kelly, currently minister of a large city church in Amsterdam, Holland, has named the challenge before us as **Retro Future**. We have to go back to find the way forward.*

The late magisterial Robert Webber in Ancient Future Faith says "Our calling is not to reinvent the Christian faith, but, in keeping with the past, to carry forward what the church has affirmed from the beginning. We change therefore 'not to be different but to remain the same' ".

In our Gospel reading today (John 17) and in the collect we are reminded that Jesus took the long view of the church, His body, the company of the redeemed. He saw us as indivisibly united to the original band of disciples. He prayed not just for them but for us who would believe through their testimony. We are today an extension of that apostolic testimony. We are not a recent invention. We have not thought all this up! We believe today because someone or some persons held true to the deposit of faith that had been

passed on and more importantly for us today- they made sure it was passed on to us. They handed on the **baton of faith** in this race of faith in which we are engaged.

The tragedy of some Christian churches today is that there is no one to pass it on to. In some places the church has lost critical mass. But there is hope! God can cause life to come out of death, out of hopelessness and impossible circumstances.

Remember Abraham, the Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 4:17 and the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

We can chart the uncertain waters of the future, when we truly understand our past and the richness of our heritage.

Just like the children of Israel, we look back every time we share in the Eucharistic meal. This stylised meal is a powerful reminder that our God is a covenant keeping God. He remains true to His promise.

As we remember and our faith is stirred again, we receive fresh courage, strength and inspiration to continue the journey".

In June and July of 2008, a team from Mobile Mission Maintenance along with parishioners undertook a massive refurbishment and repair of the main church building. The pews have departed to be replaced with comfortable chairs. A contemporary family worship service is now held on the first Sunday of the month at 10am followed by a sausage sizzle on the terrace, which has also undergone a complete makeover with new plants. With the departure of Rev Simon Hattrell to the Heatley parish in October 2009, the parish has had to look seriously at a **Local Shared Ministry** approach to maintaining a viable parish in the short and long term.

Come and share the journey with us.

MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED – 1924 TO 2009

Brotherhood of St. Barnabas

1924-29	Itinerant from Cloncurry	1944-46 L.C. Crowe
1930-32	J. Mackie	1946-48 H.M. Wynter
1932-36	H.W. Richardson	1948-51 J.C. Bradford
1935-36	Bro. Townsend	1951-52 B.M. Jones
1936-42	G. Hugh Lance	1952-53 L.S. Whereat
1942-44	R.D Drury	1953-58 A. Briggs

Rectors and Priests-in-Charge

1958-62	P. Mayhew *	1974-77 D.E.H. Philp *
1963-64	B. Tringham *	1978-81 J.M. Payne *
1965-67	D. Scott-Halliday	1981-86 D. Barter *
1967-68	W.J. Jobling !	1986-89 J.E. Emerson *
1968-74	C.E. Hampson *	1990-93 D. Ford
1970-73	P. George !	1993-2002 R.M. Marre
1973-76	A. Sage !	2004-06 C.J. Yule
		2007-09 J.S.R. Hattrell
		! St. Luke's

* Archdeacon of the Western Region

Curates and Assisting Clergy

1955-58	D.K. Williams	1979-86	L.F. Bond
1959-62	R. Philp	1980-88	G. Greaves
1962-64	E. Steele	1981-82	G. Moran
1966-67	F. Stien	1983-02	R. Rhodes
1967	Capt. B. Rawlings (C.A.)	1989-90	D. Bostock
1968-71	R.H. Wood	1991-94	P. Bland
1972-74	H. Hansford	1995-	B. T. Handley Locum 2002/3
1977-79	J. Parton	1997-2000	D. Harvey-Sutton
1979-81	I.J. Trainor	2005-	S. Handley