

**Lucky Dips**

into St Martin's parish archives

a presentation for St Martin's Day, 9 Nov. 2014

by Rodney Wetherell

with parish readers

RW: This time last year we peered into the archives of the former St Alban's Armadale, and this year it's our own archives, kept in a safe behind the organ. I've called this Lucky Dips because it's not a proper historical exercise, just a look at some interesting bits. Let's dive in, and Tim Sherwood is going to read our first excerpt, from the year 1890, when we were not yet independent of our mother parish, Christ Church.

TIM SHERWOOD: St Martin's Church, Hawksburn, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1890

To the Vestry of Christ Church South Yarra

Gentlemen,

In order to bring more clearly before your mind the justice of the claim for monetary assistance which the Board of Guardians of St Martin's Church Hawksburn makes upon Christ Church, South Yarra, we the members of the Board deem it advisable after mature consideration to present to you a brief review of the history of this Church and its relationship to Christ Church. With this object the subjoined facts, mostly confirmed by the signature of the Incumbent of the Parish, the Rev. H.F. Tucker, are selected from an official Minute Book, and we feel convinced that after the perusal, the Vestry of Christ Church will be impelled to the inevitable conclusion that they are morally and legally bound to come forward and help us at the present juncture. We may premise that during the past three years, we have made every possible effort to meet the financial difficulties that beset us, but owing to the heavy debt which incumbers the church we are unable to satisfactorily do so.....(AND SO ON, FOR 8 FOOLSCAP PAGES)

On behalf of and by order of The Board of Guardians

A.R. STEVENS

Secretary to the Board

RW: There is a bitter insistence about Mr Stevens' words, reflecting the painful difficulties of St Martin's in its early days, which went on for a very long time. Christ Church took over two months to reply, denying any responsibility for the poor financial state of St Martin's.

EDWARD MILLER: Christ Church, South Yarra, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1890

Gentlemen,

The Vestry of Christ Church South Yarra have carefully perused your letter to them of 23<sup>rd</sup> September. In reply they would point out that St Martin's Hawksburn had been duly licensed

as a Church, and has been for years governed by a Board of Guardians duly appointed under the Trustees and Vestries Act, and that the duties, rights and liabilities of the Guardians are distinctly set out in that Act. They are entirely responsible for their own liabilities, and neither legally nor equitably have they any claim on the Vestry of Christ Church as a body.

RW: The next item in this correspondence came four months later, when the Board of Guardians wrote to Tucker personally asking him to request a meeting with Bishop Goe, to go over the whole matter. Tucker's attention is drawn to the fact that the financial condition of St. Martin's is the cause of wearying and continuing anxiety to the Guardians. Here is my brief summary of the matter as I understand it:

ANN BAKER: From the St Martin's point of view, Tucker had instigated this church in 1883, along with two other chapels of ease, which incidentally did not last. Great expense was incurred, especially in the building of the church for over 6000 pounds, without a penny from the coffers of Christ Church. When the chips were down, Tucker and the big people up the hill simply washed their hands of us. From the Christ Church point of view, they had their own problems in the form of a debt of two and half thousand pounds plus a large overdraft – the spire had recently been completed – and St Martin's should by now be able to fend for itself. However, we were still not an independent parish and could not be, simply because of the mortgage, reported to be about \$4600 in 1889. It was a vicious cycle in which our Board of Guardians were caught, and at least some of them had undertaken personal liability in the event of the mortgage holders foreclosing. This was happening despite very large congregations: 3, 4, and even 500 people were counted at the morning services here, with 700 reported at one Evensong. Were they hanging from the rafters? The financial situation was only resolved in 1892, when foreclosure was threatened, and the Diocese realized the ignominy of a fairly new parish being bought by another denomination. They essentially took over the mortgage, in a complex formula which certainly did not let St Martin's off the hook. There is a fascinating 16-page summary of the whole story put together by the Diocesan Registrar William Morris, dated 1896, and it was probably Morris who actually saved the situation. We should not forget that the Diocese was struggling to pay for the building of St Paul's Cathedral, in the middle of the serious depression of the 1890s.

RW: We now turn to this wonderful book with a label hand-written by David Head 'Letters describing service at St Martin's in 1890, 91, 93 etc.' The first ten pages or so are taken up by the minutes of the Paddy's Gully Quartz Mining Pumping and Drainage Company, founded in 1859 with a capital of 15,000 pounds. If only the parish had got its hands on that much money. The person describing the services in this book was almost certainly Irene J. Helm, and she did a nice line in flowery prose.

LIZ KELLY: The services at St Martin's were unusually beautiful on Sunday June 16<sup>th</sup> when the Lord Bishop of Melbourne was present. He preached a most impressive and interesting sermon on St John 21 v.18-19, to which all listened with the greatest pleasure. The musical portions of the service were very beautiful. Instead of the customary hymn at the close of the third collect, the

magnificent anthem 'I am Alpha and Omega' was sung, the first solo being taken by Mr Stevens, the Sanctus by our new chorister Master Thorn. The first two offertory sentences were also sung by the choir. They are very beautiful, and it is much to be hoped that we may hear them frequently. The congregation was remarkably good, and much gratification was generally expressed with the excellent sermon and the sweet harmonious service.

RW: Irene Helm's detailed reports, with various crossings out, read very like drafts of documents to be printed later, but if that occurred we do not have the results. She went to London where she attended a service at the very epicentre of Anglo-Catholicism, All Saints' Margaret Street, which took her and her prose into the seventh heaven. She describes the services here on St Martin's Day 1890 – held on the actual day, a Tuesday, with two morning services, with smallish numbers, and Evensong at 8 with a very large congregation and a 'most interesting and impressive sermon' from Canon Potter of All Saints East St Kilda, a well-known priest of the day. Irene's also describes a confirmation service here, the first ever in St Martin's. This is not dated, but it has to be 1890 I think. The Bishop is again Field Flowers Goe who was no friend of Anglo-Catholicism and would certainly not have been wearing a mitre.

LIZ KELLY: The rite of Confirmation was administered by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese in St Martin's on Thursday evening July 24<sup>th</sup>. This was the first time that the young people of Hawksburn had the privilege of being confirmed in their own church. There were 30 candidates from our own Parish, 32 from Christ Church, 12 from St Lawrence's. A large number came from St Mark's Fitzroy, and also several from many other suburban churches, numbering about 100 in all. After the Preface had been read by the Rev. Horace Tucker, the Bishop came forward to the Choir steps where he delivered a most soul-stirring address from the words 'I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments' (Ps 119 v. 60), which was listened to with the rapt attention by all. Everyone must have gained instruction by listening to it. He then confirmed there, at the Choir steps, first a number of the St Martin's Choristers who went up to him two by two. They were followed by the girls, who were all clad in simple white dresses and veils, and lastly the boys. It was all an extremely touching and beautiful sight. In spite of the very inclement weather, our large Church was crowded almost to its capacity.

RW: Also in the archives is a folder of documents on the state of the church fabric, one bunch on the state of the west wall, and here are a couple of sentences:

TIM SHERWOOD: Mr J.C. Evans has examined the state of the building, so far as can be done only by inspection. He says that the west wall has certainly sunk slightly, and rather more at the outward than the inward edge. Hence the wall is out of plumb. The leanover begins from the last window in the north and south walls.

RW: I read that much over the phone to Olga Pole and asked her to guess the date of the document. It would have to be the early 1990s, she said – just what I thought – but in fact the date was 1912. The trouble came from flood water which had been allowed to stay around the

foundations, and this is a continuing problem at this moment. During the 1990s, in a process overseen by Laurie Pole, the lean in the west wall was actually corrected, with scaffolding on the church for ages – a miracle to pessimists like myself who thought the wall would inevitably collapse within a few years at most. So – nothing changes, but some things can be corrected if there is wisdom and money around.

I turn now to a thin folder obviously put together by Fr David Head, who I would say did more for the parish archives than any other vicar or parishioner for a very long time. It's all about Robert Prenzel, the German wood carver responsible for the reredos behind the high altar, as well as the panelling on both sides of it. He was born in Prussia, trained as a carver and arrived in Melbourne in 1888. He subsequently did work for some leading families in Melbourne and the Western District, as well as for Government buildings and churches including St John's Toorak and St James' Old Cathedral.

During the First World War, like most Germans, Prenzel was subject to taunting and name-calling by so-called patriots, even though he had married an Australian, and naturalized in 1897. There was a scurrilous newspaper called The Graphic which in 1916 published an article accusing various churches of encouraging what it called 'Hunnish iniquity'. Here's an extract from the article:

EDWARD MILLER: It is a shame – a thousand shames – and all those with a spark of patriotism will demand the instant removal of the work of Prenzel the Prussian, which is now disfiguring – and dishonouring – the interior of the State Treasury and St James' Cathedral. The latest sinner in this respect is St. Martin's Hawksburn where the chancel was recently renovated and adorned with a roll of honour board, handsomely carved, upon which are carved the names of Anzacs who had been members of the church. This honour board was designed and carved by a Prussian.

RW: The enemy in our midst, in other words. In a copy of this article in the National Gallery archives, Prenzel wrote 'I did not carve an honour board for St. Martin's, only the reredos and panelling'. As a result of the anti-German propaganda, he was dropped by both government and society patrons, only the churches continuing to use him as a carver. He retired to Black Rock, kept working, and died in 1941. Prenzel donated to St. Martin's a credence table for the chapel at the back of the church. He also made a second reredos for the chapel, erected in 1920, the whole chapel being dedicated as a war memorial. There's a photograph of it, but no record of what happened to it.

*We pass now to the parish centenary in 1983, when the Vicar was Fr Victor Haste. Another slim folder has notes of some events including four major services, one presided over by the Archbishop, Robert Dann, and another by the Primate, Archbishop John Grindrod of Brisbane, with no real details. An interesting page in this folder is headed The Resurrection Garden and Book of Remembrance.*

EWEN TYLER: One of the notable improvements to St Martin's church which was finally completed in its centenary year was the Resurrection Garden and Book of Remembrance. Fr John Ozanne originally suggested that a place be set aside for the deposition of ashes of the faithful. Largely between the Walsingham Chapel and the South Porch (it was the church's compost heap!) was landscaped, and brick paving was laid down; trees and ferns were established to create an attractive and peaceful area. A double glass door was installed in the archway into the Walsingham Chapel and the whole area fenced with a wrought iron fence.

The Resurrection Garden was dedicated by the Rt Rev'd David Shand, co-adjutor Bishop, on the 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1981. Later additions were a garden seat in memory of Erna Dubberlin, and a bronze relief sculpture of the Risen Christ was fixed to the wall in memory of Jane Addis who died in September 1981. The artist was Mr Tinh Nguyen, a refugee from Vietnam. In the Walsingham Chapel is the Book of Remembrance in which are recorded the names of the faithful departed associated with the community of St Martin's.

RW: We could keep up these lucky dips for hours if we had hours, but to finish up I'll put in a few things more or less at random as I reached into a big folder. There's a copy of a wonderful eulogy for Leonard Fullard who spent his last active months as an organist at St Martin's, after his decades of distinction at Christ Church. There's a speech made by Lady Kent Hughes, widow of Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes, as she opened an art exhibition here to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish in 1973 – this was in Clyde Wood's time.

DIANE HOLDSWORTH: Like the blessed saint after whom it is named, the parish has had its good times and its difficulties, but somehow the church has always progressed, and added, and improved, and retained its place, and grown in stature.

RW: Lady Kent Hughes obviously had great affection for the parish and recalled her mother-in-law talking of the whole family walking in crocodile formation from their home in Toorak to St Martin's – there were ten children, so it must have been quite a sight. Her talk is mainly about the Arundel prints which had been collected by Canon E.S. Hughes, and donated by his brother Dr Kent Hughes in 1924.

DIANE HOLDSWORTH: In the parish paper of March 1913, the Vicar, J.S. Hart, exhorts people to a holy observance of Lent. Forthcoming meetings were for Vestry, the Ladies' Guild, Girls Friendly Society, Tillers' Union, District Visitors, Choir, Sunday School Teachers, Boys' Club, Men's Society and Mothers' Union – some of these were weekly, some monthly. Notes of the month begin: 'At the Annual Meeting, a cheerful report was inevitable, considering the cheerful balance sheet. Our total income was about 875 pounds, or 80 pounds more than last year. We were able to pay 89 pounds off our big debt.' On Wednesday of Holy Week, the parish choir was to perform Stainer's Crucifixion. There was a plea for donations to cover the cost of new chairs for the growing kindergarten, part of the Sunday School, at three and sixpence each.

RW: There is an invitation to a Mock Wedding Breakfast and Dance on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1944 or thereabouts, put on by the Church of England Fellowship. This was in the incumbency of the Rev'd Edward Schwieger. The CEF was a very lively organization, the key to which was one Robert Jones, who seems to have been a great parish livewire. He later became President of the Diocesan CEF – a young people's fellowship which later became the YAF. There's an ad for Martifest, a festival of performing arts around St Martin's Day 1974, with two concerts, a son et lumiere show, and a play based on a mediaeval mystery play. This was when the Rev'd Peter Chesterman was Vicar.

The last of our lucky dips is a prayer for St Martin's with no date on it, and I hesitate to even guess at it – let's say the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has a shameless plea to the Almighty for larger numbers and better finances. I like the appeal to 'arouse the careless'.

SAM GOODES: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who dost govern all things in Heaven and Earth, mercifully hear our prayers, and grant to this parish all things needful to its spiritual and temporal welfare; especially at this time, enable us to build up our regular congregations, and to increase the financial support of our parish. Strengthen and confirm the faithful; visit and relieve the sick; turn and soften the wicked; arouse the careless; recover the fallen; restore the penitent. Remove all hindrances to the advancement of thy truth, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within the fold of Thy Holy Church, to be honour and glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.