



Hi Folks,

After lockdown we reopened the church shop on 3rd November. For the first 6 days we had rain and, when the rain stopped, 3 days of gale force winds before the rain returned. Not entirely suitable weather for outdoor eating but we are hanging in there. We are planning a carols night for Sunday 19th December.

Unfortunately some of our volunteers have not returned from lockdown or are not yet confident in returning and so the church shop and church buildings are closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. Sunday services have resumed.

This newsletter includes a reflection from our zone minister Rev. Ann Perrin, some information on the church in the 1950's and an article written by The Land journalist John Ellicott.

On behalf of our church congregation I wish our extended 'congregation' a happy and blessed Christmas.

Ted Brill

From the Minister's Desk

God, Our Everpresent Christmas Blessing!

When feeling a bit lacklustre I have often taken myself out to the Ebenezer Church to sit with God in God's creation. To remove my shoes and feel the grass beneath my feet as a way of reenergising. I have often pondered that first church service under the tree across the road from the church. The rhythms of the prayer book, scripture, and song comforting those who have taken the extraordinary step to book passage on the Coromandel to the colony known as New South Wales, not quite 20 years old. While the voyage out here would have wrested them from all they had known as worshippers, the context of that first service would have reinforced their understanding that things would ever be the same again. Those rhythms while recognised would have taken on new meaning as different words and phrases become more prominent in this different setting.

And so I come to this Christmas respecting their courage to put what they had known behind them and wonder what that first Christmas service looked and felt like. Perhaps they sang While Shepherds Watched their Flocks as it was written in 1700, Hark the Herald Angels Sing published in 1739 and the relative newcomer Come All Ye faithful first published in 1744. But as we regather this year, face to face in church, I wonder if new carols as they made their way out to the

colony would have been welcome? Angels from the Realms of Glory written in 1816 followed by Silent night in 1818, and Once in Royal David City written 1848. Given their pioneering spirit I would like to think that they perhaps they would have embraced these new carols and made them their own in their new context.

But then, how different this would have sounded to the ears of the first peoples, the Dharug speakers, and I often wonder if the specialness of the Ebenezer site was felt by them and part of their dreaming.

The carols we sing this Christmas I believe will once more take on a new meaning as they do most years given the ups and downs of life. The Christ came to offer hope to a world still not understanding that God offers us all we need to flourish. To know that God travels with us through tough times like lockdown, and the uncertainty of the coronavirus but also in our celebration of God with Us, Jesus Christ. This year will be even more poignant and our prayers more heart felt as we here at Ebenezer, with the world, look out onto the New Year and wonder what it might bring for us.

In all God's stories of endings there are seeds of hope because an ending is always a prelude to a beginning and with God those seed of hope lead to kernels of joy that break open when the newness arrives: the Christ child among us. Like Zechariah who whispers loving, and we now know prophetic words of a father to his son John, we listen again to those words and take them into our hearts:

*"By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*
(Luke 1:78-79 NRSV)

May God's tender mercy break upon you this Christmas season and may you find the joyous blessing of the light to help those in need and that will lead you into the way of peace in the New Year.

Rev. Ann Perrin

Team Leader, Hawkesbury UCA Mission Zone

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This newsletter is sent to over 200 postal and 390 email addresses. Should you wish to make a donation ... BSB: 634634, Account: 100014363, Acc. Name: Ebenezer Pitt Town Parish. Please inform the secretary of your donation by email.

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Ebenezer Church in the 1950's



This is a popular photo of Ebenezer Church, the historic tree standing to its full height, the church in the background and Coromandel Road appearing to be an unfenced lane through a church neighbour's paddock.

But what is that parked beside the historic tree? A close up view shows that it is a motorbike with a sidecar, a vehicle which was popular in the 1950's.



A second photo below gives a clearer view of the motorbike and sidecar.



The motorbike was owned by none other than the minister at that time, Rev. Tom Prisk. Rev. Prisk lived with his wife Jean in the manse at Pitt Town and they travelled across to Ebenezer Church for an 11.00am Sunday service.

Thomas Prisk was introduced to the Ebenezer - Pitt Town Parish congregation in November 1952. Having completed his studies as a minister he was both ordained and inducted on 5th December 1956. This was the first occasion that a minister had been ordained in Ebenezer Church.

At Pitt Town Rev. Prisk built up the Fellowship and Sunday School.

Major anniversaries celebrating 150 years at Ebenezer took place during Rev. Prisk's period of ministry. They included, in 1953, the anniversary of the first service, and on 16th May 1959, the anniversary of the building of Ebenezer Church.

And getting back to that motorbike and sidecar. Current church member Bev Douglass, a teenager and member of the Fellowship at that time, remembers the sidecar being filled with paper for a paper chase that started at Pitt Town and finished at Ebenezer Church.

And recently a man by the name of Phil told us of his parents' relationship with our congregation and Rev. Tom Prisk in the 1950's. In 1951 his parents William and Henderika migrated from Holland and initially stayed with 600 other migrants at the Scheyville Migrant Centre near Pitt Town. With our congregation actively involved in assimilating migrant people William and Henderika became good friends with our church people.

William was able to get a job in the city and to get to work he first walked 5km to Mulgrave train station. He was at work one day when Henderika decided it was time to go to Windsor Hospital to give birth to Phil. How was she going to get there? To the rescue came Rev. Prisk, his motorbike and sidecar. Phil said that if his mother was not ready to give birth when she climbed into the sidecar she certainly was by the time she arrived at the hospital!



Rev. Prisk and his wife Jean greeting members of the congregation at Ebenezer Church

Hawkesbury rose: Australia's oldest church, voice of the ages

Article & photos by John Ellicott , The Land, 29th Oct 2021

When the congregation sings in Australia's oldest church there is a family resonance there that has echoed between the sandstone walls for over 210 years.

Some of those who sit in the pews at Ebenezer church by the Hawkesbury River are direct descendants of those who first cut away the stone that created this wonderful and peaceful sandstone building, completed in 1809 by architect Andrew Johnston.

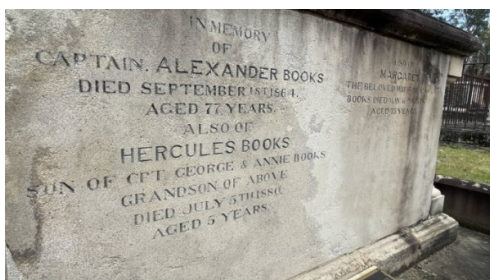
The church is also linked by a courtyard to Australia's oldest extant schoolhouse and nearby are the ruins of an early bread oven.



Completed in 1809, Ebenezer Church amazingly still greets local descendants of the early pioneers who built it

It was a wild landscape for those early settlers, the Turnbulls, Johnstons, Cavanoughs and Gronos, but bit by bit they created a new life in a new country. The river was their highway and on the slopes of the Hawkesbury they started the early farms of the new colony, John Turnbull creating the first commercial orchard in Australia, growing peaches.

A lot of the agriculture was to do with pigs (quick to breed), corn and wheat. They came to church by boat and when there was a funeral, they'd see the coffin transported on the water, and form a boat convoy behind it until they reached the sandy bank just down from the church, and the mourners would make their way up the slope for the service and burial.



The grounds of the church hold many old gravesites.

All of the pioneers, according to the Ebenezer church's secretary and former Ebenezer Public School principal Ted Brill, started life on the Hawkesbury in tents, cooking outside, with children running about, until they finally built houses. John Turnbull's house still stands and is occupied. Wisely, he built on a rocky outcrop above the flood line, that was only tested again earlier this year in an almighty flood. The Hawkesbury River, though brutal at times, was the lifeblood to the early settlers moving their goods around by boat.

The grounds of Ebenezer Church spill down to the riverbank and the lawns are beautifully manicured, beds of roses surround the church, and birds bathe in the birdbath by the church window, and the light pours into the stone-surfaced courtyard that leads from the church to the old schoolhouse.

After all the issues with the lockdown and pandemic the church's cafe and shop will reopen on November 3, 10am to 3pm open Wednesday to Sunday, and once again greet guests who are always amazed they are sitting under the vine covered pergola by the oldest church in Australia.

Across from the church is a large old trunk of a gum tree that was used as the first place of service for the pioneers before Ebenezer church was built.



Mr Brill says the church newsletter goes all around Australia. Before lockdowns they often had car clubs meet on the grounds for the day. "I think we had about 225 people in the Mazda MX-5 car club, that was a lot of people to cater for that day," he says.

A small congregation of about 17 attend the church service on a Sunday, now a Uniting Church, a former Presbyterian church.

He says the church raised \$240,000 leading up to its bicentennial year in 2009, that helped complete a large number of renovations and new toilet facilities. Governments put in \$60,000 but a fair chunk of the rest flooded in from descendants of the early pioneers. "I couldn't believe the generosity of people, they would send a cheque for \$1000, a couple of \$100, it was amazing."

The church has had to dig into its cash reserves during the pandemic with visits stopped by lockdowns and so the reopening of the cafe will mean a lot to the community next

Wednesday. [That was 3 November.]

Rebecca Turnbull is a direct descendant of John Turnbull and also has some Cavanough blood in her family line - a double dose of Ebenezer heritage. She was so inspired by the heritage she decided to seek a career in museum curation, and now is curator at Hawkesbury Regional Museum in Windsor.



"The connection is great and it inspired me to become a museum curator. It's also been very lucky that there is a strong community out there and volunteers that keep the church going.

There are so many still there with links to the early history. For me, preserving history is very important. I think we are all concerned that the history of the Hawkesbury is preserved

as more and more housing developments edge towards the district."

Many Hawkesbury City Councillors also recently raised concerns that the Hawkesbury must preserve its historic links, and also as the birthplace of so many agricultural pursuits in Australia.

One of the early agriculturalists was John Bowman who established grain and stock operations by the Hawkesbury (before going almost broke). His large two-storey brick house still sits by the main road at Richmond and is now used for offices.

At every corner and turn in the Hawkesbury there is some link to the colonial past, (The Macquarie Arms, 1815, at Windsor, is the oldest pub in Australia) and also the agriculture of the present.

The unassuming Ebenezer church is a wonderful example of the old inspiring the new, sitting as solid as the day it was built.

There are no ghosts known at the church, but Ted Brill says some people report a 'presence' in the old schoolhouse.

More photos at ...

<https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/7490206/church-of-the-hawkesbury-river-resonates-to-past-and-present/>

Dedication Services

Two families have booked gatherings at Ebenezer Church in 2022 with members coming from Queensland, London, the Philippines and the USA. They are having the ashes of late family members interred in columbaria in the church cemetery. Both groups are Cavanough family descendants.

People of the River by Grace Karskens

When the Ebenezer settlers took up their land grants they were blocking access of the Aboriginal people to the river. Conflict occurred on some properties but not on others, and we wonder why this was so. Grace Karskens establishes that the Aboriginal people had lived on the Hawkesbury for 50,000 years and she explores the lives of the people, both black and white, and their relationship. A good read!

Donation

We thank the Stubbs Family Association for their recent donation for the upkeep of church grounds. Should you wish to make a personal donation ... BSB: 634634, Account: 100014363, Acc. Name: Ebenezer Pitt Town Parish. Please inform the secretary of your donation by email.



By 1953 most Ebenezer worshippers travelled to church by car, but not Mr & Mrs Joe McKenzie. Their 32 year-old pony had been going to Ebenezer Church every Sunday for 30 years. The pony was previously owned by Mr George Johnston, a descendant of pioneers Andrew & Mary Johnston. Joe McKenzie was a descendant of Robert McKenzie, a sealer who was marooned on an island off the west coast of New Zealand and rescued by Captain John Grono.

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