



## **Ebenezer Church**

Ebenezer - Pitt Town Uniting Churches

# ***Newsletter***

August 2006 No.1

**Ebenezer Church (1809) – first Presbyterian Church – oldest existing church - in Australia**

### **Welcome!**

Dear Everyone,

Descendants of Ebenezer Church pioneers, past ministers and members can feel proud of their heritage. The story of the beginning of the Ebenezer Church and its continuation since 1809 is one that continues to interest, amaze and inspire people.

Through this newsletter our current church congregation aims to inform you of the activities of the church, our plans for the future and the approaching bicentenary celebrations in 2009.

As our church congregation is smaller than in previous years, we seek your support in this important anniversary.

Thank you for registering your interest in Ebenezer Church and so receiving this newsletter. If you have relatives or friends who would like to be added to our mailing list, please forward their names and email/postal addresses.

Ted Brill  
For Ebenezer Pitt Town Congregation

### **A Message from the Minister**

Since becoming a part of the Ebenezer and Pitt Town Churches in 1996, I have found that the community of these churches extends far beyond the regular congregations.

The building of the toilet block at Ebenezer highlighted this with the many gifts of time, expertise, equipment and materials. I have also found that the community includes many who have connections of history, being descended from the early settlers, some of whom are members of the various Family Associations or who have come to us at important times in their lives.

As we work towards the bicentenary in 2009, it is a time for all of our community to come together, celebrate our rich heritage and share it with our nation.

It is a large undertaking which can only be achieved through the continuing support of all of our church community. Please feel free to contact us with your suggestions, ideas, questions and any assistance that you can give, to help us share our heritage and faith with our nation.

Rev. Grant Bilbey

### **Ebenezer Church in 2006**

One question often asked by visitors to Ebenezer Church is "Do you still hold church services?" Yes, we do. Ebenezer Church, the oldest existing church, is still a 'living' church. Our minister, Rev. Grant Bilbey, conducts services each Sunday – 8.30am at Ebenezer, 10.00am at Pitt Town. Baptisms are often part of the service, the recipients being children of district residents or descendants of church pioneer families. The church is also a popular venue for weddings.

A major focus of church members is the sharing of the story of Ebenezer Church with visitors and to provide a tourist location that is both caring and educational. This is done through the activities of the shop in the Schoolmaster's House beside the church. Our volunteers keep the shop open daily, except for Good Friday and a few days near Christmas, and have been doing so continuously since December 1989. Visitors may enjoy devonshire teas and purchase locally made jams, craft, souvenirs and books. Visiting coach groups may book in for teas and lunches and an historical talk.

Other church activities include monthly family/children's services, Fellowship, Youth Group, KUCA Club, Scripture in Schools, a Spring Fair and annual Pilgrimage.

### **Extension of Ministry**

Rev. Grant Bilbey's period of ministry at Ebenezer Pitt Town began in October 1996 and ends in October this year. However an application has been made to the Nepean Presbyterian of the Uniting Church to extend this time by three to four years. The main reason for doing this, besides the fact that Grant Bilbey enjoys wide support from the congregation, is the bicentenary of the church in 2009. The congregation feels that planning for such an event will be delayed by at least 12 months if a change of ministers is to occur before 2009. A reply is expected soon.

### **Church Contacts**

#### **This Newsletter- Property & Finance:**

Ted Brill, ('On leave' until 24 Sep 2006)  
59 Tizzana Road, Ebenezer, 2756  
02 4579 9235 [tedbrill@bigpond.com](mailto:tedbrill@bigpond.com)

#### **Minister:**

Rev Grant Bilbey 02 4572 3153  
Uniting Church,  
Bathurst Street, Pitt Town, NSW, 2756  
[ebenpittuca@optusnet.com.au](mailto:ebenpittuca@optusnet.com.au)

**Shop Bookings & Inquiries:** 02 4579 9350

## Bicentenary of Ebenezer Church

The date chosen for the major day of celebration of the bicentenary of Ebenezer Church is  
**Saturday 20 June 2009**

It is probable that other events will be held leading up to 20 June 2009.

Our Church Council is seeking assistance in planning and staging this historic event. An organising committee will be formed by the end of this year. Ideas for displays, re-enactments, activities ... names of people/associations that you feel are capable of making a worthwhile contribution... are welcome.

## Ebenezer Church 'Towards 2009' Bicentennial Appeal

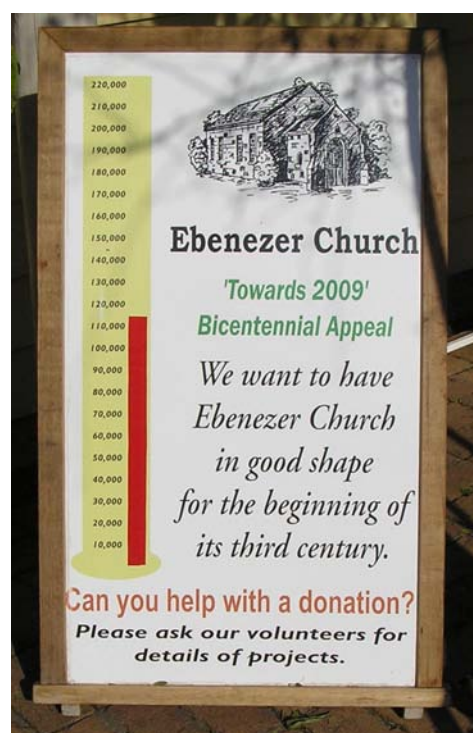
The congregation wishes to have the church and its associated buildings in good shape for this occasion, the beginning of its third century.

Much restoration has been achieved over the last fifteen years, mainly by means of fundraising by the current congregation and also by donations. The church floor has been replaced, windows have been restored, the pavilion floor has been levelled, boundary fences have been renewed, unsightly electricity poles have been removed from church grounds and additional land has been purchased near the church to provide a buffer zone from future development. This has been a mammoth effort when you consider that the church has a small congregation in comparison to earlier years.

### Work needed on church property includes...

- Repairs to the church roof and the mortar on the external walls.
- Gutting and internal refurbishing of the vestry
- The nearby Schoolmaster's House is in need of internal painting and restoration work to the upstairs rooms.
- Restoration of the baker's oven is a project that would add interest to a visit to the historic precinct of the church.
- Repairs to the roof of the pavilion (church hall).
- New toilet facilities were also needed and now have been constructed.

For all of this work to be completed \$220,000 is needed. An appeal was launched in June 2005.



### How are we progressing?

Of the \$220,000 needed, \$114,000 has been achieved. This includes a grant of \$33,000 from the Federal Government.

Also, a new amenities block has now been completed (see report next page).

So that Ebenezer Church will be in good shape for the beginning of its third century the appeal remains open for donations.

### Donations for the 'Towards 2009' Bicentennial Appeal may be ...

- Handed to our volunteers in the Ebenezer Church Shop
- Posted to: Debbie Logue, Treasurer,  
EPT Uniting Church, 78 Coromandel Road, Ebenezer, NSW, 2756.  
(Please make cheques payable to Ebenezer Pitt Town UCA )

## CONSTRUCTION OF NEW AMENITIES

Our first project in our *Towards 2009* Renovations Program was the construction of a new amenities block. Our starting point was a photograph that we had found in 1989 in the National Library. It shows that there were once three timber slab buildings on the church property. With the assistance of architects Louise Ommundsen and Rolfe Chrystal, a similar building was designed and approved by the NSW Heritage Office and Hawkesbury City Council.



Ebenezer Church (right), Schoolmasters House and three timber slab buildings (left) in church grounds that were dismantled c.1900

Work began in August 2005. The project was under the supervision of the church Property & Finance Committee. Finance was obtained from church fund raising, donations, a \$33,000 grant from the Federal Government and a loan from the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church.



Timber slab toilet block built in church grounds in 2006

## COMPLETION OF PROJECT

Despite the rain on the morning of Saturday 15 July there was a great response with at least 100 people turning up for a morning tea to mark the completion of this project. It was an indication of the support we have experienced and an opportunity to thank everyone who had helped on the way.



Rev. Grant Bilbey (*Right*) with Member for Macquarie Kerry Bartlett and Mayor Bart Bassett in front of the new amenities block

And what support we experienced! There was the help from the local community – a concreter, an electrician, a construction engineer, a roofer, earth-suppliers, our local hardware store H.R.King & Sons, operators of backhoes, bobcats, ...local tradesmen who have completed the work for only the cost of materials or at no cost at all. Many are people who have been involved over the years in other Ebenezer community projects including a new fire shed, a training/meeting room at the fire shed, a tennis/netball court at Ebenezer Public School and new floors for the church and pavilion.

Current church members also played their part. The church Property & Finance Committee was 'the builder' and members led by Bob Palmer provided support where and when they could. In this way considerable savings were made.

Through the launching of our *Towards 2009* Bicentenary Appeal we obtained financial support from church members, descendants of pioneer families and past members and ministers, visitors to the site and the general community. MP Kerry Bartlett supported an application for a grant and the UCA Synod (NSW) approved a loan at favourable interest rates. All of these people are thanked for their help.

This project...

- has been completed well within budget
- has made the congregation realise that they are not alone in their desire to get all Ebenezer Church property up to a high standard of maintenance by 2009
- has enhanced the commitment of the congregation, through the operations of the church shop, to share the story of Ebenezer Church, a story that is an important part of our national Christian heritage.



## A Colonial Churchyard

Ebenezer Church, Ebenezer,  
New South Wales



*The Southern cross lies overhead,  
The river by my side  
Could I ever place my head to rest  
O'er all earth wide.*

Compiled by  
Ebenezer Church Cemetery Trust

## A Colonial Churchyard

Ebenezer Church, Ebenezer, New South Wales  
Compiled by Ebenezer Church Cemetery Trust

This book contains all inscriptions on memorials in the Ebenezer Church Cemetery plus historical information on church pioneers.

It is available for purchase from the shop in the Schoolmasters House at Ebenezer Church, Ebenezer. Mail orders accepted – but please delay ordering copies until late September.

### Cost:

Book - \$33 per copy

CD - \$20 per copy

Book plus postage - \$38 per copy. CD plus postage - \$25 per copy  
(Prices include GST)

Orders may be placed with:

Ted Brill, 59 Tizzana Road, Ebenezer, NSW, 2756.

Payment is required with each order. Please make cheques payable to Ebenezer Church Shop.

For more information: Sue & Ted Brill 02 4579 9235  
[tedbrill@bigpond.com](mailto:tedbrill@bigpond.com)

## A Place To Worship

'It's the embodiment of endurance. It signifies the faith, courage and commitment of a fledgling colony. And it's a lasting testament to the history of our nation. It's Australia's oldest church, located at Ebenezer on the outskirts of north western Sydney, not far from the early communities of Richmond and Windsor ....'



From the magazine  
'Rick Rutherford's COUNTRY'  
Volume 2 No. 2

## Visit by 'Sydney Weekender'



Channel Seven's **Sydney Weekender** visited the Hawkesbury on Tuesday 21 February and included a visit to Ebenezer Church. The picture shows Mike Whitney and the production team outside the church. The program went to air on Channel Seven in March 2006.

## Ebenezer Church Visit

*Do you belong to a group or association?* Groups are welcome to visit Ebenezer Church for a morning / afternoon tea or lunch. Visits include an historical talk on the church at no additional charge. Bookings are essential for groups for teas and lunches. Phone 02 4579 9350.

The Schoolmaster's House near the church is open daily for individual visitors and families.