



Preservation Post

Newsletter of the
Christ Church Preservation Society (Inc.)

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Issue 71 – March 2021

“Looking to the future to preserve our past”

Christ Church Taita

Upcoming Events:

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 10 April, 1.30 pm at the Church

167th Annual Service

Sunday 30 May, 2.00 pm

Feature Family – Kennedy-Good

The church was filled to capacity for the Christmas Service on 3 December. Once again, David Dell and the Take Note Singers led the singing of favourite Christmas Carols.



As there were not sufficient members of the Society at the SGM to approve the Visitor Centre, a short meeting was held at the conclusion of the Carol Service (with a quorum of Life and Annual Members). The Resolution to allow the Museum Trust to proceed with the erection of a Visitor Centre on the grounds of the Church was passed.

Annual Service – 1 November

Rev Colin Barnes was our guest speaker at this service. He was the Minister at St Matthews in Taita and at Christ Church at the time of the fire in 1989. He gave an extremely

interesting talk, which we share with you at the end of this newsletter.

Change of Postal Address

While the cost of postage goes up regularly, so does the cost of keeping a Post Office Box. The amount of mail coming into this box is now minimal, and with the advent of banks no longer accepting cheques, it will be even less. Our new postal address is now that of the Secretary (see the header on your newsletter).

From the treasurer

Another financial year for us ended on 31 January and it is pleasing to be able to report that our investments through the Wellington Diocese investment fund has resulted again in a very good return for the year ended 31 December 2020 of over 13% or approximately \$17,000. However this is our main source of income and without it we would have ended the financial year with a loss of over \$5000.

With subscription and donation income of less than \$5000 it is imperative that we focus on increasing both donations and memberships. Our interested families are asked to review family memberships and consider giving life or annual memberships to the next generation or providing for an additional donation now or a legacy in a will. We cannot rely on continuing returns on investments at the rates we have been experiencing over the last couple of years, remembering that we made a loss three years ago.

We are very grateful to those who continue an annual membership to the Society. (Subscription notices will be attached to this newsletter). The number of annual members is dwindling and this has an impact on our ability to continue to maintain the

church and its grounds in good order and condition.

During our 150th celebrations we offered a special Life Membership and many members took advantage of this as it represented great value for money. However, while this generated immediate funds at the time, it is not a guaranteed income.

We also have a great database of people who love the church as much as our members do.

Our members come from all parts of New Zealand and often comment when they visit how appreciative they are of the work the committee does. We know you can't support our work in a physical sense, but would appreciate it if you could consider either becoming a life member (\$500); an annual member for \$50 a year or giving a tax deductible donation. Our bank account is 02 0528 0019498 00.



Hindsight is a fine thing:

The writer was recently given a file of Preservation Posts and Annual Reports dating as far back as 1972. The Annual Report to the AGM of 27 April 1979 stated:

“Fire prevention has been discussed and a quote for installation of a Vigilant alarm system received from Wormald Vigilant Limited. However, your Committee decided not to accept this as the cost was high; also, it appeared that the system was not entirely suitable to our needs. A fire hose reel on the north wall of the entrance porch was also considered but the problems associated with its installation and the likelihood of vandalism made this method appear unsuitable. Finally, it was decided that the best safeguard was to ensure the cooperation of tenants in the neighbouring council

flats; also to keep the churchyard as clear as possible of inflammable material. The Secretary has approached one of the neighbours, who has agreed to store a hose which could be attached to the present tap. She and her family will keep an eye on the church for us and give a warning if necessary.”

. . . and history has not changed . . .
. The report concludes with:
“Finally, we suggest that a vigorous effort should be made this year to enlist younger persons into our membership.”



Weddings

7 November
Shirley Daubney to Andrew Munro

14 November
Cathy Martin to Warren Powell

5 December
Liz Gibson to Alastair Wilson

Bequests for Christ Church Taita

Including a bequest for The Christ Church Preservation Society is a wonderful way to honour those who have gone before us and to ensure that we can continue to preserve and develop Christ Church.

Ashes Wall

A niche in our Ashes Wall costs just \$750.00 plus GST. Contact Janice Henson, Secretary, for further details.
info@christ-church.org.nz

Annual Service Speech by Rev. Colin Barnes:

“When the Bishop of Wellington, Edward Norman, invited me to be Vicar of Taita in 1983 I was not aware that there was another church in the

parish which came under my care. I was delighted when I discovered that it was a historic church built by the early settlers in the 1850s, the second oldest church in New Zealand and the oldest in Wellington. I love history, and during my ministry in the UK I was assistant curate of a 14th century church and vicar of a 16th century church. And now, in New Zealand I had another historic church to look after. Fortunately, in this case, I was not responsible for Christ Church financially. That was taken care of by a body of people, some of whom were descendants of the early settlers and known as the Christ Church Preservation Society; which had a hard-working and dedicated committee with whom I enjoyed a warm and happy relationship for 15 years.

Although St. Matthew's was the parish church where the Sunday and weekday services were held, there were also several services each year here in Christ Church for which I was responsible – the Annual Service commemorating the building of the church, the Christmas Carol Service. And baptisms, weddings and funerals mainly of people who had some association with the church.

Christ Church was also in demand by television people (the TV studios at that time were in Avalon) and it featured in several TV advertisements. It also featured in the TV series, 'Country GP' which was made, I think, in the 1980s. The church was invaded for several weeks by TV crews, actors and actresses. It was great fun to go along occasionally to the rehearsals. I

think the drama was set in the 1800s. The producer needed an organist for some of the scenes within the church, and my wife was persuaded to play. Although dressed in period costume like the cast, she would only allow her hands to be seen playing the instrument. My never enjoyed the limelight.

The church was the scene of some minor incidents – broken windows and glue-sniffing by children in the porch but three more serious incidents stand out in my now not-so-sharp memory.

The first was the vandalizing of a number of graves, Maori graves being a special target. After this act of vandalism was discovered I met with Maori elder, Sir Paul Love, in the graveyard to view the damage. Both he and I were deeply distressed by what had happened. The Maori graves belonged to Te Ati Awa chief, Manihera Matangi (who incidentally was a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi), and his wife Hoanna Waitare. They were buried in the 1880s. Their graves. Along with others, had been daubed with black Klu Klux Klan slogans. Hoanna Waitara's headstone which was written entirely in Maori was blacked out while below the inscriptions Klu Klux Klan markings had been painted. Manihera Matangi's headstone had been pushed off its pedestal.

Not long before this happened, pupils from Taita College had been involved in a study of the church. When they heard what had happened, they were so upset that they asked if they could become friends of Christ Church, help

clean up the damage and look after the grounds working in with the Preservation Society. There are always plenty of good young people to compensate for the not-so-good.

Another major incident was an application to build a waste treatment plant next to the church. (This was after the fire and restoration of the church). I, along with the Preservation Society and residents who lived in the nearby houses, were incensed about this proposal. The TV people got hold of the story and I along with some of the residents appeared on the TV news programme voicing our objections. I pointed out that the church and its grounds was a place of peace and tranquillity for people who came to visit, services and weddings were held in the church, and a waste treatment plant would bring noise and possible nasty odours and stray waste. The residents had similar objections – well, who wants a waste treatment plant in their backyard? On behalf of the Society, Dr. Bob Stewart and his wife made a presentation to a joint meeting of the Wellington regional Council and Hutt City Council as a result of which the proposed project was not allowed to go ahead. It was a great relief to us all.

On a personal note. My appearance on the TV news programme was seen by a young woman in Christchurch. She contacted me and it transpired that I had taught her in primary school in the UK in the early 1960s. She had emigrated to NZ in later life. I remembered her and her name even though I never saw her again after she

left primary school. It was good to make contact after all those years. I can't have been a bad teacher or she would not have got in touch, I guess. It is always good to be well remembered.

The third major incident was, of course, the fire which ravaged the church on the 19th November 1989. The blaze had been started by an arsonist (or arsonists). It was a devastating blow to me and especially to the members of the Preservation Society and the descendants of the settlers who had built the church in the 1850s and which had survived earthquakes and floods unscathed, as well as an attempt to move it from its original site to Stokes Valley.



I had driven past the church in the early hours of the morning and all was well. To be told by the police what had happened was devastating news. Residents in the nearby houses had spotted the fire and called the fire brigade and this quick action I am sure, saved much greater damage and possible total destruction. To go along and see the church shortly after the fire was terribly upsetting.

Apparently, the fire had been started at the east end of the church inside the building. It destroyed the tracery of the east window, the altar. Altar rails, lectern and organ; sweeping through the interior of the church and severely damaging many of the pews. The font at the west end of the church was badly scorched and blackened as were many of the timbers. About 40 per cent of the building had been affected. It was a painful experience for me to stand in the middle of the devastated church which had meant so much to so many people. Devastating too for the committee of the Preservation Society who had so lovingly cared for the building and done so much to keep it in good repair. As I stood there, I wondered who could have done such a thing and why? The arsonist or arsonists have never been found,

Phil Allen, husband of Jessie, the church cleaner at the time of the fire, had salvaged some charred hymn books and an old Bible from the east end of the church which he thought may have been used to start the fire .

After the initial shock of the fire the question now was whether the church should be restored or pulled down. The Society's president at the time was George Hooper who was hopeful that restoration could take place. He pointed out that the church's floor tiles, porch and bell-tower, along with some parts of the walls and roof were not affected by the blaze – that it was not in fact a total destruction. He also said that an architect would estimate the cost of the restoration and that the matter would be discussed at a soon-

to-be-held meeting of the Society. At that meeting the Society voted overwhelmingly for the restoration of the church.

Now it was up to the Vestry of St. Matthew's, of which I was chairman, to endorse the Society's decision. Although many Vestry members lived outside the parish and had no particular interest in Christ Church, I am happy to say that with one exception the members voted in favour of restoration which should be as nearly as possible to its original state.

The Society was fortunate to engage the services of architect Ian Bowman who was a member of the Historic Places Trust. He would direct the restoration. Ian was young and energetic. I met with him several times to go over plans for the restoration and I found him to be passionate about the church and its restoration. The cost of restoration was estimated at \$150,000 but I think it ended up nearer \$170,00. About \$90,000 could be claimed from insurance.

So, fund-raising began in earnest. A Restoration Appeal Committee led by the Rev John Terris was formed. Various appeals, including a public appeal, were made and fund-raising events held. I remember Leila Pilkington, Nancy Cole, Christine Hooper and I dressed in 19th century costume at an Old Time Picnic in Petone on Wellington Anniversary Day highlighting the Appeal and soliciting donations from those attending the Picnic. It was a good and quite profitable day

I was contacted by a person who had done drawings some 20 years before of the altar, altar rails and lectern all of which had been destroyed in the fire. These drawings were a godsend as they enabled these items to be crafted as exact copies of the originals. Two or three pews escaped damage and are at the back of the church. All the rest were newly crafted and match the originals. It was decided to keep the badly charred font as a permanent reminder of that fateful day.

Builders Mort and Dave Kells, who had family connections with the church undertook the restoration work. They did a fantastic job and the church now appears just as it did when it was first built. It was a cause of great thankfulness and joy that this historic building had been so beautifully and faithfully restored

Almost two years after the fire and when restoration was complete, a Service of Dedication was held in the presence of the Archbishop of New Zealand and Bishop of Wellington, the Most Rev Brian Davis, the sermon being preached by the Archdeacon of Belmont, the Ven. Judy Hardie. It was a joyful service of thanksgiving that this church which had stood on this site for 135 years had been restored to its former glory and, by God's grace, the Guardian of the Valley for many generations to come."