

St John's Church – An Early History of a Colonial Church

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Introduction

This essay will discuss the early history of the first St John's Church in Halifax Street, Adelaide. It will begin by looking at the background to the building of the church and in particular, the peculiar nature of the settlement of Adelaide. It is in the foundations of the colony that the beginnings of St John's are best understood. St John's did not develop in isolation and its shaky beginnings reflect much of what was happening in the colony. It is also because church does not exist in isolation that, where possible, reliance on annual vestry reports alone has been avoided. To give a year by year account of the election church wardens and financial statements is not only boring but fails to provide a full picture of the history of the church and its responses to the community in which it exists.

Background

The view from St John's in Halifax Street affords an expansive view of the parklands, eastern suburbs and the development in Adelaide hills. To the west is urban development and alfresco cafes. It wasn't always like this though. Once it was open grasslands with many different eucalyptus and was the home of the Kaurna people who called the Adelaide region Tandanya, meaning 'place of the red kangaroo'.¹ In 1836, a permanent European colony called Adelaide (after the English queen) was established in the area.

Under the leading lights of George Wakefield and Robert Gouger the new settlement was to be established as a free colony with migrants purchasing blocks of land in England, prior to the voyage to Australia. According to Marsden, "Adelaide was created by deliberate commercial acts and brought about by the forces of capitalism and investment."² Another distinguishing feature of the new colony was its emphasis

¹Gargett, Kathryn, Marsden, Susan, *A Brief History of Adelaide*, Adelaide, State History Centre, 1996, p. 5.

² Susan Marsden, P Stuart and P Summering (ed), *Heritage of the City of Adelaide*, Adelaide, Corporation of the City of Adelaide, p.17. nd.

on religious and civil liberty. Several of the founders were Dissenters (not belonging to the Church of England) and wanted the colony to be free from the religious bias that was evident in England.³ Robert Gouger wrote in 1836,

We appeal to the Dissenters, ... because those of their body who may settle in this new colony will have the full enjoyment of the civil and religious liberty ... since no one sect or denomination will be put in possession of any exclusive advantage; all classes of Christian being placed in an equality.⁴

One such Dissenter was George Angas who headed up the South Australian Company. As well as suitable landowners, Angas also sought an appropriate labour force that he found not only in selected English workers but also in Lutheran refugees fleeing persecution in Germany.⁵ Commercial enterprise along with the ideal of voluntary contribution to the churches (as opposed to state funded) was at the heart of the foundation of the state. Initially the British Government was not totally in favour of such freedom and part of the 1834 South Australian Colonization Act provided for the government (British) to “appoint and pay a colonial chaplain from the ‘Established Church of England or Scotland’.”⁶ The first chaplain to the colony was Charles Beaumont (CB) Howard. Sailing on the first ship, *The Buffalo*, he befriended the Colonial treasurer, Osmond Gilles. Trinity College trained, Howard was an evangelical, affable and willing to work hard in the new colony as the incumbent to the first church in the colony – Holy Trinity.⁷

Need for another church

In 1840, the South Australian Church Building Society outlined the need for a second Anglican church. The British population was expected to reach 20 000 by the end of the year and Holy Trinity Church, although recently expanded, could only accommodate 600. Furthermore, it was concerned that, “[I]n a new colony where secular occupation are, for many reasons, more absorbing than they are in communities of earlier institution, there is a peculiar danger that the importance of public worship ... should be forgotten.”⁸ The land (half of town acre 551) in the

³ Elizabeth Kwan, *Living in South Australia: A Social History*, Vol 1, Netley, South Australian Government Printing Press, p. 12.

⁴ Robert Gouger, quoted in Kwan, *ibid*.

⁵ Kwan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶ Kwan, *op. cit.*, p.12.

⁷ John Whitehead, *Adelaide, City of Churches*, Magill, MC Publications, 1986, pp. 46-47.

⁸ *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 18 February 1840, npn and 'Colonial Church', *Register of Ecclesiastical Intelligence*, February 1841, London, Joseph Rogerson, February 1841, p. 14.

south-eastern corner of Adelaide on which the church was to be built was a gift to the Church Building Society, from Osmond Gilles.⁹ The church was “first intended to serve those living in the outlying districts of Norwood, Rose Park, Glen Osmond, Burnside and Unley.”¹⁰

On 19 October 1839, just three years after the founding of the colony, the Governor George Gawler laid the foundation stone of St John’s. A staunch evangelical, Governor Gawler was particular pleased with the founding of another church as “it was furthering religious enterprise, and secondly because he favoured the erection of buildings as a means of giving employment to the people under his care.”¹¹ The laying of the foundation stone was quite a social event for the colony, attracting many colonists. The *Register* newspaper reported, “[A]fter the ceremony, His Excellency, the ladies and gentlemen present partook of an elegant collation prepared for the occasion by the hospitable attention of Mr Gilles.” who lived adjacent to the site.¹²

Although some £540 was raised for the building of the church, this was only sufficient to cover the costs of the foundations and further work was stalled for another two years.¹³ In early 1840 the Church Building Society wrote that it was “extremely desirous to continue and complete the building of St John’s church ... but, unless the funds of the Society were considerably augmented by liberal contributions, that object cannot be effected.”¹⁴ Indeed it was the lack of funds that, to some extent, determined the position of the second Anglican church. The first annual report of the Church Building Society in 1841 commented on the position of the church, noting that:

“objections have been made to the site on which St John’s Church is being erected, on the ground of its being too far removed from the populous part of the city; but your committee do not conceive that the state of the funds at their disposal would warranted them in purchasing a site elsewhere at the exorbitant price demanded for town land at the time they resolved to build. They had,

⁹ ‘Religion and education in South Australia in 1840’, *The South Australian Advertiser*, 11 May 1881, p. 6.

¹⁰ ‘Adelaide’s second church’, *The Advertiser*, 8 October 1931, p. 14.

¹¹ ‘St John’s Church. The diamond jubilee’, *The Advertiser*, 3 October 1908, p. 13.

¹² *The South Australian Register*, 26 October 1839, p. 4. p. 5.

¹³ ‘St John’s Church’, *The South Australian Advertiser*, 25 April 1863, p. 4.

¹⁴ ‘Colonial Church’, *Register of Ecclesiastical Intelligence*, London Joseph Rogerson, February 1841, p. 14 and *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 14 February 1840, npn.

therefore, gladly availed themselves of the liberal gift of Osmond Gilles, Esq.”¹⁵

On 6 September 1840, almost a year after the laying of the foundation stone, the Revd James Farrell arrived in Adelaide to become the second Church of England minister in the colony. He had been invited by Governor Gawler, and was sponsored by the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). Born in Ireland, he was educated at Trinity College, ordained in 1823 and took up a position as a private chaplain in Paris to the American Colonel Thorn, followed by clerical duties in England.¹⁶ Howard wrote to Bishop Broughton in regard to arrival of Farrell, “[A]lthough there is no church ready for Mr Farrell at present still [sic] I trust that within the period of five years one at least will be completed.”¹⁷ In the meantime they proposed to divide the pastoral work between them including conducting services in nearby villages.¹⁸

The two clergymen seemed to have complemented each other well and were both popular. Howard was described as “uniformly urbane and gentlemanly in his deportment ... with an interesting young family”, and was held in high esteem by many.¹⁹ In contrast, James Farrell was described as “a man of bright and lively mien”.²⁰ He was unmarried, with few social aspirations. His early work in the colony was directed towards working men, simplifying worship and preaching evangelical sermons.²¹ He was “[D]eeply imbued with doctrinal sentiment, and sincerely anxious to benefit his hearers, ... [he drove] away at the fundamentals of religion and never let you forget there were grievous errors around you against which you were to set your faces like flint.”²² A quote from his obituary further described him as being “a popular and talented man, ... [who] possessed some eloquence, great tact, and much power of observation.”²³ It also notes how he, “was followed (to St John’s Church) even by

¹⁵ RJ Glover and Rev E Fuller, *Centenary Souvenir of the Church of St John the Evangelist*, Adelaide, Hunk, Ellis & King, 1939, p. 7. See also ‘St John’s Church some early history’, *The Advertiser*, 4 October 1919, p. 13.

¹⁶ ‘The late Very Rev Dean Farrell’, *The South Australian Advertiser*, 8 June 1869, p. 2 and Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, 2nd ed., Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p. 252.

¹⁷ The late Very Rev Dean Farrell’, *loc. cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ ‘The late Colonial Chaplain’, *South Australian Register*, 22 July 1843, p. 2.

²⁰ ‘A much loved clergy-man, Canon Andrews’, *The Advertiser*, 4 October 1913, p. 6.

²¹ Pike, *loc. cit.*

²² ‘The pulpit in South Australia’, *South Australian Magazine*, Vol 1, No VII, 1842, p. 245.

some of Mr Howard's old congregation, which did not, however, produce any breach in the strict friendship which united these gentlemen."²⁴

The fledging colony must have been quite a cultural shock for him and perhaps the status of his new church had not been properly explained. Mr Hawkes in 1863, reported that Farrell, anxious to see his new church, "was sent, as he thought, a long way into the bush to find out the spot, for Adelaide was then covered with a wattle forest. At last he discovered the foundations, which alone existed of the church in which he was to preach."²⁵ RJ Glover further related that Farrell who had, "expected to find [the] church ready – found only stonework, foundations complete ... sat down and cried."²⁶

While the accuracy of this story is uncertain, it serves as a focal point on which the arrival of British clergyman to a new colony can be more fully contextualized. At the time of Farrell's arrival, the colony was in a precarious financial position. Due to delays in the land being surveyed, immigrants settled in the town, spending their money rather than cultivating the land and establishing much primary production. Speculation was also rife and by 1839 there were significantly inflated land values. Money, although plentiful at first, began to dwindle. "All the money not absurdly invested in rash speculation inland went out of the colony for other purposes."²⁷ Supplies were bought from Sydney and Hobart. Further to this, considerable money was spent on imported liquor and tobacco. One writer observing that, "[S]ome future historian will have to say of us 'truly we are a nation of drinkers and smokers'."²⁸ The government purse was also empty with money being spent on labouring programmes, a police force and public works.²⁹ It was into such an environment of improvidence that James Farrell, the Trinity educated, former private chaplain found himself.

²³ 'The Late Very Rev Dean Farrell', *loc. cit.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ 'St John's Church, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ RJ Glover, *A Brief History of the Church of St John's*, South Australia, RM Osborne, 1909. (This is a collection of monthly installments, on the history of the church taken from the parish newspaper, *The Chronicle*.) (Vol IV, No 4.)

²⁷ John Blacket, *History of South Australia. A romantic experiment in colonization*, Adelaide, Methodist Book Depot, 1907, p.163f. See also RM Gibbs, *A History of South Australia*, Port Pirie, Balara Books, 1969.

²⁸ Quoted in Blacket, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

²⁹ Blacket, *op. cit.*, p. 164 and Gibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Farrell was evidently eager to begin his work at St John's and began conducting services in a temporary chapel in Halifax Street.³⁰ Services were held here for some nine months until the church was built.³¹ The first vestry meeting was held at the vestry room of the 'Temporary Chapel of Ease', on Wednesday 9 December 1840, with Dr BA Kent, and Mr J Hanse being appointed as wardens. The initial pew holders were Robert Spiller, GH Lockyer, Alfred Hardy and William Bartley.³² The duty of wardens, funds and the conduct of service were discussed. The second vestry meeting was held in April 1841, where wardens were elected for the year.³³

During the first year of Farrell's ministry in South Australia it is obvious that he worked hard gathering a congregation. The Church Building Society's annual report for 1841 expressed considerable faith in him. "[A]s the temporary premises used by Mr Farrell were occupied every Sunday by a numerous and attentive congregation it was confidently hoped that the [new] church ... 'would be filled by worshippers'."³⁴ Such sentiments were also echoed in *The Adelaide Independent*. "St John's Church will be under the ministration of the Revd Mr Farrell, a gentleman, who has endeared himself greatly to all classes, since his arrival among us, by his christian [sic] character, and devotion to his duty. We trust that he will soon collect a large congregation."³⁵ The *South Australian News* also noted at the time of the opening of the church that, "Mr Farrell is deservedly much liked, and will secure a large congregation."³⁶

St John's in the Wilderness Church (as it was called) was opened on 24 October 1841. The first service commenced at 11am with CB Howard delivering the sermon. A collection was taken "towards the liquidation of the debt incurred in the erection of the church".³⁷ Although the opening of the church was advertised in the newspapers, there was, curiously, as Glover noted, no mention of it in the vestry records!³⁸ The

³⁰ 'Church of St John', *The Advertiser*, 8 June 1918, p. 9. See also 'St John's Church', *loc. cit.*

³¹ *South Australian News*, 15 November 1841, No. 6, p. 51.

³² 'St John's Church, some early history' *loc. cit.*

³³ Glover and Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁴ 'St John's Church, some early history', *loc. cit.*

³⁵ 'Domestic intelligence', *The Adelaide Independent*, 21 October 1841, p. 46.

³⁶ *South Australian News*, 15 Nov, *loc. cit.*

³⁷ 'St John's Church', *The South Australian Register*, 23 October 1841, p. 1. See also *The Adelaide Independent*, 21 October 1841, pp. 45-46.

architect was William Hancock and RG Bowen the builder. The building was incomplete at the opening due to lack of funds, having no ceiling and in need of plastering and pews. The total cost of the building was £2100 of which £1300 had been paid. It appears that much of the remaining debt was paid off by the “liberality of friends in England.”³⁹ It was reported as, “a plain but comfortable-looking and neatly finished brick edifice, lately finished, situate [sic] in the south-eastern part of the town ...”⁴⁰ It was further described, along with St Luke’s, as being “very humble in style.”⁴¹ Initial descriptions of the proposed building included foundations stones that reached some four feet above the ground and that it would be “finished in a chaste but handsome manner.”⁴² It is unclear whether the lack of funds contributed to any modification to the building.

Amongst the people connected with the early church, are those, it has been correctly observed, “whose names are writ large in the history of the State.”⁴³ As well as the aforementioned Osmond Gilles who became a church warden in 1842 and Governor Gawler who was a trustee in 1844, other prominent names include, Charles Sturt (the explorer) and Sir Robert Torrens (author of the *Real Property Act*, (both were guarantors of the loan to the church), Henry Ayers (politician, business man), Charles Bonney (first Commissioner of Crown Lands) and Mr C Mann (Advocate-General).⁴⁴

From its inconspicuous opening in 1841 and for the next several years, the church, despite its array of prominent citizens, struggled financially, suffered low attendances and lack of ministers. So much so that it was closed at various time between 1843 and June 1846. The balance sheet for March 1842 shows only fifty sittings let.⁴⁵ In 1843 CB Howard died and Farrell took over Holy Trinity Church, leaving St John’s

³⁸ Glover and Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 7. It could be speculated that services had been held in the Temporary Chapel, and the ‘opening’ simply involved moving from one building to the church.

³⁹ ‘St John’s Church’, *loc. cit.* (1863) and ‘Domestic intelligence’, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ JF Bennett, *Historical & Descriptive Account of South Australia*, London, Smith, Elder & Co, 1843, p. 124.

⁴¹ William Marcus (ed), *South Australia: Its History, Resources and Production*, London, Sampson, Law, Marston, Serle & Rivington, 1876, p. 24.

⁴² *The South Australian Register*, *loc. cit.* and ‘Adelaide’s second church’, *The Advertiser*, 8 October 1931, p. 14.

⁴³ ‘A brief history of the Church of St John The Evangelist’, compiled by P Knight, 125th Commemorative Dedication and Souvenir Brochure of the Church of St John the Evangelist, Halifax Street Adelaide. 1839-1964, Adelaide, Corporation of St John’s Church, Adelaide, 1964, p. 8.

⁴⁴ ‘Church of St John’s (1863), *loc. cit.*

⁴⁵ Glover & Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

without a minister and lacking funds – hence its closure. Although closed from 31 December 1843 to June 1846, some 30 marriages and 88 baptisms were recorded.⁴⁶ Pew-renters felt defrauded at the situation. One Church of England member wrote, “[I]t is our fault. If we guaranteed a small salary we should receive more clergymen. We are not accustomed to the Voluntary Principle as Dissenters ...”⁴⁷

Further misfortune occurred in November 1844 when the parsonage was destroyed by fire. Prior to his death, Howard had asked Farrell to look after his wife and four daughters. While Farrell moved into the Chaplain’s cottage at Holy Trinity, Mrs Howard and her daughters moved into St John’s wooden parsonage.⁴⁸ JW Bull wrote of the fire:

Then came the burning of a structure called the Octagon Cottage, the first residence of the Colonial Treasurer, Osmond Gilles Esq., one of the London-built frame houses constructed of deal which he had given with land on which it stood as a parsonage for St John’s Church. At the time of the fire the cottage was occupied by the widow of the first Colonial Chaplain, with whom was her sister [sic]. The fire broke out after the ladies had retired to rest, and they only had time to save their lives.⁴⁹

At a vestry meeting on 2 June 1846, the Revd William Woodcock was appointed as minister at St John’s.⁵⁰ A salary of £100 pa was guaranteed by the SPG.⁵¹ Arriving on 7 May 1846 with his wife, five children and a servant, he was also accompanied by the Revd James Pollitt, his wife and four children.⁵² Farrell who was now the only priest in the colony of some 12000 Anglicans greeted their arrival with great delight.⁵³ After the fire at the Octagon Cottage, Woodcock and his family lived at a brick parsonage at St John’s. This building is probably the one depicted in Revd Theodore Wilson’s painting of ‘St John’s Anglican Church and parsonage’, c1852.⁵⁴ Like the

⁴⁶ Glover & Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁴⁸ Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 254. (Farrell and Mrs Howard married in 1846, ‘The late Very Rev Dean Farrell, *loc. cit.*’)

⁴⁹ JW Bull, *Early Experiences of Colonial Life in South Australia*, Adelaide, printed at the *Advertiser, Chronicle and Express* offices, nfd, 1878, p. 48.

⁵⁰ ‘Local intelligence’, *The South Australian Register*, 3 June 1846, p. 2.

⁵¹ Glover and Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 9 & ‘St John’s Church’, *loc. cit.*

⁵² *The South Australian Register*, 9 May 1846, p. 3. (A further child was born 24 Oct 1849, ‘Birth’, *South Australian Register*, 27 October 1849, p. 3.)

⁵³ Norris, William, *Annals of the Diocese of Adelaide*, London, SPG, 1852, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁴ Rev E K Miller recalls visiting Woodcock in a brick parsonage at St John’s. EK Miller, *Reminiscences of Forty-seven Years’ Clerical Life in South Australia*, Adelaide, AH Roberts, 1895, p. 27 and Rev Theodore Percival Wilson, *St John’s Anglican Church and parsonage*, c 1852, photographic copy, State Library of South Australia. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/10068232>

church itself, the building of the new parsonage provided work for local industries.⁵⁵ In an address in 1863, it was reported Woodcock was a Puseyite, (high church). However there does not appear to have been much change in style of worship and it was observed, “that the only evidence of ... [his] being so was that ... [he] wore black silk waistcoats cut very close.”⁵⁶ Woodcock’s endeavours also suggest a far more evangelical disposition.

The Revd Woodcock appears to have been a man of great fervour and zeal, and this is evident from his previous appointments. While as a young missionary in India (1834-1837), he along with Revd Joseph Peet exacerbated a breach in the relationship between the Church of England and the Syrian Orthodox Church, where patience and tact might have been a more prudent course.⁵⁷ A further appointment was in the Bahamas, where he became the first minister of St Agnes Church.⁵⁸ Of his time here, it is written, “[a] consumptive who had come to the Bahamas for his health, Woodcock burned himself out in a brief but brilliant campaign to provide Anglican-based education for the underprivileged blacks ...”⁵⁹ A man of private means he left property in trust to the diocese for the maintenance of day schools for the people of Bains’ Town.⁶⁰

During his ministry at St John’s Woodcock became a distinct public figure, campaigning for state support of religion.⁶¹ He was also elected to the Council of the new St Peter’s College, was provisional chairman of the Provisional Board of Directors of the South Australian Widow’s Fund and General Annuity Endowment Society and was chaplain for the Oddfellows.⁶² He also called for aid from the colony,

⁵⁵ ‘St John’s Church. the diamond jubilee’, *The Advertiser*, 3 October, 1908, p. 13.

⁵⁶ ‘St John’s Church’ (1863), *loc. cit.*

⁵⁷ Kochukunju, Joy, ‘Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church’, www.Kudassanad.com, 2010, (accessed January 2011).

⁵⁸ ‘Anglican diocese’, *St Barnabas Anglican Church*, New Providence The Bahamas, 2011, stbarnabas@coralwave.com. (accessed January 2011.)

⁵⁹ Craton, Michael and Saunders, Gail, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People: Volume 2: From the End of Slavery to the Twenty-first Century*, Athens Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1998, p. 28.

⁶⁰ ‘Anglican diocese’, *loc. cit.*

⁶¹ See for example ‘State support to religion - public meeting of the colonists’, *SA Register*, 22 July 1846, p. 3 and ‘Letter to the editors’, *South Australian Register*, 15 August 1846.

⁶² *South Australian Register*, 26 May 1849, p. 2, *South Australian Widow’s Fund and General Annuity Endowment Society*’ *South Australian Register*, 21 February 1849, p. 1 and ‘Ancient Independent Order of Oddfellows’, *South Australian Register*, 11 August 1849, p. 2.

to give famine relief in Ireland.⁶³ Woodcock was secretary to the newly formed South Australian Church Society, promoting and supporting the establishment of churches and schools in the colony.⁶⁴

1848 was an important year in the history of St John's, but unfortunately as Glover commented, the "minute book [is] destitute of all records except a balance sheet."⁶⁵ To some extent the activities of 1848 marked a consolidation of the position of the church as a going concern. There was considerable work done on the fabric of the church, largely funded by donations. A new organ was built locally by Mr Marshall of Currie Street and was installed in a recently constructed gallery in the west end of the church.⁶⁶ The church was also plastered and redecorated in red and yellow colours, which caused some controversy. Marsden reports that some thought the colours "were more suitable for the choice of dress of Negro ladies."⁶⁷ Bishop Short consecrated the church on 1 October.⁶⁸ The Sunday school was also opened in that year, although according to Revd Woodcock, there were only a few attendees in relation to the number of people who attended the church.⁶⁹

Stable Years

Archdeacon Matthew Blagden Hale was appointed minister to St John's at the end of 1849 after Woodcock became minister at Christ Church in North Adelaide.⁷⁰

Archdeacon Hale's time at St John's was brief, moving to work with Aboriginal people at Poonindie and later became the first Bishop of Perth.⁷¹ Other early ministers included the Revd P Wilson (later first headmaster at St Peter's College), the Revd JC Bagshaw (later principal of Nelson College in New Zealand), the Revd AR Russell (moved to St Bartholomew's), the Revd JS Jackson (SPG missionary in Delhi), the Revd DJ Ibbetson and the Revd JT Smythe.

⁶³ See for example, 'British destitution' *South Australian Register*, 16 June 1847, p. 2.

⁶⁴ 'Anniversary of the South Australian Church Society', *South Australian Register*, 4 October 1848, p. 4. *South Australian Register*, 29 Aug 1846, p. 2, *South Australian Register*, 9 Sept 1846 p. 2.

⁶⁵ Glover, (*The Chronicle*, Vol VI, No. 10, 1908.)

⁶⁶ *The South Australian Register*, 5 July 1848, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Marsden *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 218 and 'St John's Church', *loc. cit.*

⁶⁸ Adelaide's second church', *loc. cit.*

⁶⁹ Glover, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, No 2 and *South Australian Register*, 24 November 1849, p. 2.

⁷⁰ 'St John's Church', *South Australian Register*, 1849, p. 2.

⁷¹ 'Hale, Mathew Blagden (1811-1895), biographical entry', *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, (accessed January 2011).

Despite a passing parade of ministers, the 1850s and 1860s were relatively stable and reflect the growth of the settlement.⁷² Growing pastoral and mining concerns were very important to the economics of the colony.⁷³ Many of the large pastoral owners, merchants and professionals chose to live in the city, building mansions along East Terrace, which afforded a lovely view toward the Adelaide Hills.⁷⁴ Hence, the south-east corner of the city became more populated including more parishioners for the church.

Vestry meeting during this time were mainly concerned with funding, repairs to the church and pew rents. At a vestry meeting in 1866, it was decided to build a new parsonage on East Terrace. The parsonage was completed in 1868, costing 60% more than estimated.⁷⁵ The church became active in both fund raising and promoting cultural activities, the two often converging. These included musical evenings, teas and bazaars. Lectures given predominantly by the clergy were also a popular way of fund raising.⁷⁶ Participation in such activities reflects more stable times, when the community was less concerned with the uncertainties of life in a new colony and had the time and the inclination to take part in such pursuits. It also indicates the church was willing to be proactive in raising funds and be self-supportive.

As well as Woodcock's work with the Church Society and in establishing Christ Church, St John's and its clergy were also instrumental in the establishment and support of other churches. Russell who became minister at St John's in 1855, initiated the building of St Paul's and the two Sunday schools came together for combined picnics. It was commented that the "church is really a sister church to St John's."⁷⁷ St John's was also involved with the church at Unley, although the exact nature of this is somewhat unclear. It was reported that, "Unley remained with St John's till [sic] the opening of its church in 1870."⁷⁸ It was said that St Johns "took St Bartholomew's under its protective wing," when it shared the costs of the stipend of Denzil Ibbetson

⁷²Glover and Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷³ Kwan, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ Kathryn Gargett and Susan Marsden, *A Brief History of Adelaide*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Glover & Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷⁶ See for example, *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 June 1861, p. 3, 'Topics of the day', *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 December 1865, p. 3, 19 September 1866, p. 2, 13 September 1869, p. 2, 4 October 1870, p. 2 and 17 May 1871, p. 2.

⁷⁷ 'St John's Church. The diamond jubilee', *loc. cit.*

⁷⁸ 'St John's Church, Halifax-Street [sic]', *The Advertiser*, 16 October 1929, p. 23.

in 1861.⁸⁰ Ibbetson's untimely death in 1871 brought both congregations together in their grief.⁸⁰ St John's involvement with the above churches is very much in accordance with its original brief, that of serving the outlying districts in the east. It is however worthwhile considering the extent to which St John's was associated with the growth of Anglican churches throughout Adelaide. It was reported that,

St John's is the parent church of St Augustine's, Unley, St Bartholomew's, Norwood and St Paul's, Pulteney-street [sic], whilst among its grandchildren may be numbered St Mark's, Maylands, St Theodore's, Rose Park, St Oswald's, Parkside, all with churches and parishes of their own, the two mission districts of the Unley parish, St Chad's, Fullerton and the church of the Emmanuel, Wayville.⁸¹

The early Anglican church in Adelaide was evangelical in character. Perhaps the nature of a new colony, especially one founded on religious tolerance, had a particular appeal to evangelical activism. The early involvement of SPG and support (not least financial) was vital for the establishment of new churches, especially St John's. At the consecration of the church, the bishop, "denounced the dangerous error of praying to Saints and angels, warning hearers of the 'fatal tendency of symbolic worship'."⁸² Canon Andrews observed that, "[A]ny idea of vestments was out of the question in the early days. Men seemed to be [unreadable, bent?] more on bringing the power of religion into the community as far as they could. They felt that the first thing to be done was to preach the Gospel."⁸³ Ibbetson, "who had great intellectual vigor" was particularly opposed to ritualism.⁸⁴ An early photograph of the interior of St John's, taken a little later than the scope of this essay (c1880), would suggest a more evangelical style of worship.⁸⁵

The water hazard and other obstacles

Travelling to St John's was not always easy and worshippers faced several hazards on their journey! Part of the problem was the location of the church. The south-east

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* See also Glover and Fuller, *loc. cit.*

⁸⁰ 'The Rev DGH Ibbetson', *The South Australian Advertiser*, 11 September 1871, p. 5.

⁸¹ 'St John's Church, Halifax-Street' [sic], *loc. cit.* (punctuation as in original text) The report did not mention Mary Magdalene's Church in Moore Street.

⁸² *South Australian Register*, 4 October 1848, p. 3.

⁸³ 'A much loved clergy-man', *loc. cit.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ S Solomon, c1880, Adelaide, Mortlock Library, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/13626310>

corner of the city was, in the early days, the least populous. Revd Miller who arrived in 1847 gives some indication of the state of the roads and tracks in Adelaide.

The greater number of buildings were in the North-West part of the city, as being nearest the Port. Between King William Street and St John's in the Wilderness there were scarcely any buildings ... In winter it took considerable navigation to get from the vicinity of St John's to the more inhabited part of town after dusk. Often, after turning in various directions to avoid the holes of mud and water, the pedestrian, attracted perhaps by a light, would find himself about where he had started from, or on the Parklands, a belt of land surrounding the city, and then a forest of dead trees. Victoria-square [sic] was a specially [sic] dangerous locality, there being but two or three narrow tracks across it, to diverge from which was almost certainly to get bogged.⁸⁶

Access to St John's remained problematic for many years. "Let him [a correspondent wrote in 1862] on a wet Sunday take a walk over by St John's Church way, and he will soon see what an amount of mud and slush people have to wade through to enable them to attend Divine service."⁸⁷ In the winter of 1861, the church-wardens placed a formal request to the council asking that the footpaths around the church be repaired.⁸⁸ Even in 1879, there were complaints about "a wide gulf of slush through which foot-passengers and the congregation of St John's Church had to plod their way over their ankles [sic]."⁸⁹ A poorly covered well, apparently some sixty feet deep, close to the church was also of considerable concern, especially as there were children going to and from Sunday school.⁹⁰

Paintings

The church became a popular subject for artists, perhaps because it was one of the few substantial buildings in the area or maybe because the location presented as a suitable panoramic setting. Early paintings of St John's depict a small building set against the background of the Adelaide Hills and surrounded by pasture.⁹¹ Samuel Gill's paintings of the church contain the same elements, but he also populated them with churchgoers, creating an elegant rhythm of European middle-class respectability

⁸⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁸⁷ 'CW', 'St John's Church', *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 June 1862, p. 3.

⁸⁸ 'Municipal Corporation', 29 August 1861, p. 3

⁸⁹ 'Ratepayer', 'State of the city', *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 April 1879, p. 6.

⁹⁰ 'Caution', 'A dangerous well', *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 April 1864, p. 3.

⁹¹ See for example, unknown artist, *Early water colour of Halifax Street*, watercolour, 22 cm x 17.5 cm, State Library of South Australia, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/12786697> and Wilson *loc. cit.*

and civility.⁹² Theodore Wilson's paintings along with that of the unknown artist and that of James Shaw suggest a rural idyll, a tamed and domesticated foreground while still surrounded by the largely unknown Adelaide Hills.⁹³ These paintings strongly reflect the nature of the fledging colony. Here at an Antipodean outpost, European culture and religion had a tiny foothold on an seemingly strange and enigmatic land.

In 1964, the Revd Don Wallace observed that, "[T]he original St John's congregation were pioneers. They faced the task of establishing a nation, and the equally formidable task of meeting and dealing with all the new knowledge that was just waiting to be born at that time."⁹⁴ From a tentative beginning the church had grown into an established church, with fine leaders and strong community support. Little was it known that before the turn of the twentieth century, a school would be established and that the church would be knocked down and built up again – but that's another story!

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⁹² Gill, Samuel Thomas, 1818-1880, *St. John's Church, Adelaide, South Australia*. (184-), sepia wash, 11.9 x 20.2 cm, NLA, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2381107> and Gill, Samuel Thomas, 1818-1880, *St. John's Church, East Terrace*, (ca. 1850), [sepia?] wash, 10.8 x 13.3 cm, NLA, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2376977>

⁹³ Shaw, James, unknown title, 1855, nfd, St Johns Church, *125 Commemorative Brochure*, op. cit., p. 7 and Wilson, loc. cit.

⁹⁴ Don Wallace, in *125 Commemorative Dedication ...*, op. cit., p. 6.

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Anglican Diocese of Adelaide www.adelaide.anglican.com.au

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