

A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE PARISH
OF
ST PAUL'S WAIWHETU
IN
THE CITY OF LOWER HUTT
NEW ZEALAND

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WAIWHETU, LOWER HUTT, NEW ZEALAND.

Regular services were first held in the parish in 1928. A brand-new Church-room in White's Line East was dedicated by Archdeacon Allan M. Johnson at an afternoon service on January 29th, the Sunday nearest St Paul's Day. Probably the name 'St Paul's' was given to the Church because of this association; but whatever the reason, the name of the Church in this area has always been, and still remains, St Paul's.

At this time, and for the next eighteen years, Waiwhetu was part of the parish of St James's, Lower Hutt, the mother Church of the lower Valley. Services were the responsibility of the clergy of St James's; and in carrying out their task they were supported by lay readers of that Church and by other helpers from the Waiwhetu area.

The need for a Church was created by the opening up of the area for settlement when the new railway was built as far as Waterloo. Prior to this the area that now forms the parish was mainly farm lands or market gardens, with closest settlement in the Maori Block bounded by Waiwhetu Road, White's Line East, and the Waiwhetu stream. The site for the Church was bought by the vestry of St James's, and the cost of the building was met for the most part by the efforts of the ladies of the parish. Members of the vestry supervised the building of the Church-room, and were helped by men of the Anglican families who had settled in the district. As in other new settlements families were busy getting their homes in order; and it says much for their enthusiasm, and for the prevision of the vestry of St James's, that the Church-room was got ready for worship as early as January 1928. The railway to Waterloo was only opened in May 1927, and naturally enough there was little house building before then.

The records show that services were regularly held in the newly-dedicated Church-room, beginning with weekly evensong, and Holy Communion at 8 a.m. on the first Sunday of the month. The original building was a plain rectangle, with a porch, kitchen, and toilets attached at one corner, the entrance being from Hawkins Street. The White's Line frontage presented a formidable obstacle in a big open ditch which carried storm-water from the area down to the Awamutu stream, by this time bridged by the White's Line ramp. As the only Hall in the area east of the railway line, the Church-room was in demand not merely for the social and Sunday school activities of Church members, but for a variety of other purposes such as meetings of the Townswomen's Guild, a Lodge, gatherings of Sports clubs, and later a Kindergarten. For a long time, indeed, there was a conflict between the desire of the Church committee to reserve the building for worship, and the pleadings of other social or educational groups that lacked a home of their own. To preserve some necessary decorum, the altar was a wall fixture with folding doors which could be closed when the Church-room became a Hall for secular purposes; and the 'sanctuary' was a platform or stage at the White's Line end of the building with short steps against either wall.

In 1930-31 an extra 'Small Hall' was added at the White's Line end, with entry from the stage. Several years later again a Chancel was added, with choir stalls, sanctuary, and organ, this time at the northern (Hawkins Street) end. The dedication service for this Chancel was in November 1940. This addition enabled the cupboard altar to be removed to the sanctuary; but for a number of years folding screens shut off the Chancel from the body of the Church when the Hall was used for other purposes. The stage was finally removed in 1946.

The Small Hall - very valuable for Sunday school purposes and other activities - went through several changes. The addition of the Chancel at the other end of the Hall led to a re-designing

of the 'exits and entrances'. The entry from the Hawkins Street end became the choir door, and the little porch was added to the still smaller vestry to make a kitchen-cum-vestry for the choir and clergy. The main entry for the congregation was at first by a side door into the small Hall; but when the stage was removed in 1946 double doors were cut through the White's Line wall and also into the main Hall. A little porch was added at the White's Line end; and then the small Hall became that porch of happy memory for the many parishioners who stopped behind after service for the weekly chat.

For about ten years after 1938 services were taken by the clergy of St James's assisted by a number of lay readers; but this part of the parish was not assigned its very own clergy until the arrival of the Rev W.E.W.Hurst from Ireland in 1938 to take up a curacy at St James's. But after having weathered the years of the Depression, the parish was soon to suffer again from the War. Mr Hurst took almost every service till he joined the Armed Forces as a chaplain early in 1940; and till he returned in 1945, arrangements for services were as they had been prior to his coming. His return to work in Waiwhetu paved the way for the first great change in the status of St Paul's - to that of a Parochial District instead of an Outpost of St James's.

To justify this change there had to be a vicarage; and there was no room for it at White's Line. There should also be a Hall distinct from the Church which should be reserved for worship. The Church-room was intended to be the Hall; but where should the Church go? After some hesitation the present site at the corner of Guthrie Street and Waiwhetu Road was bought in 1945, large enough for Hall and vicarage as well as Church. There followed much argument on priorities. A vicarage necessarily came first, and Mr Hurst and family duly took possession in 1947. But what should come next? A Church, leaving the building at White's Line as a Hall? Or a Hall, which might commit us to go without a new Church for some time? Or should we dispose of the White's Line property

altogether - there were enquiries for it - and with the proceeds build a Church, or alternatively another Church-room, on the new site? The problem was not easy. There was practically no money except what was tied up in the White's Line property, which had appreciated considerably in value.

On the Guthrie Street site were two old cottages which were also bought. One was used to put the other in reasonable order, and St Paul's House was born. To this small but accommodating old building were transferred many of the activities that had been developed at White's Line, including the Weekday Kindergarten. Possibly the usefulness of this old house, and the increasing demands on it, were the factors that decided the vestry to give next priority to a Hall; and the parishioners endorsed their decision in June 1952. There was still very little money available; but the cost would be much reduced if the greater part of the work were done by the unpaid labour of parishioners. Some assistance was expected, and was indeed obtained, from Government, which was prepared to assist a venture that promised to be of value to the ever-increasing juvenile population of the district. Other assistance came from merchants and tradesmen; and a loan was available from Diocesan funds. The foundations were dug in December 1952; and in January 1955 the Hall was dedicated by Archbishop Owen, and officially opened by the Rt. Hon. Walter Nash. The intervening two years were times of great activity on Saturdays; for the whole of the work, except for making and siting the roof trusses and fixing the tiled roof, was done by men of the parish, with real and tangible encouragement from the ladies.

So in 1955 we had a commodious Hall, a good vicarage, and a most useful St Paul's House, all on the Guthrie Street - Waiwhetu Road corner. The Church stood alone, a good quarter mile away on White's Line. There was still ample room for a Church on the new site - and still no money. Further, there was a fast developing problem in our own Outpost over the Hill. Wainuiomata was within

the boundaries of the Parochial District of Waiwhetu, and its problems took up some of the time of the vestry, though the Anglicans over there showed a splendid spirit of self-help. Because of the increasing work in the whole area, the vestry had already - in 1954 - committed itself to the appointment and payment of a parish assistant. The appointment of a curate was also under consideration, and he was indeed appointed in 1956, in the same month as the debt on the new Hall was finally extinguished. Yet the apparently unpromising financial prospect did not discourage the parishioners who, at a special meeting in October 1955, instructed the vestry to go ahead with plans and estimates for a new Church. Indeed, spurred on by Mr Giesen, their sights were to be raised beyond an estimate of £15000. At this time the New Church Building Fund had only a few hundred pounds; but there would be something available from Diocesan funds - perhaps - or at least permission would be granted to go ahead with a mortgage if a reasonable amount were subscribed.

In December 1955 Mr and Mrs Giesen each gave £100 to the New Church Fund. By March 1956 contact had been made with the architect, and plans were being considered. This was the year of the Wells organisation; but the vestry decided to go their own way. The parish was to be canvassed house by house. By the end of the year £1552 had been subscribed. Then the next great decision was taken: to sell the section at White's Line but to remove the Church - the 30 year old Church-room with its more modern additions - to the site occupied by St Paul's House, leaving room for the new Church when it could be built. The Fund benefited by about £4000 from this transaction; and by now almost £2000 more was in hand from other sources. St Paul's House, less the two back rooms and the verandah, was shifted to the rear of the new Hall, and later was joined to it. All Church activities were now on one site; and parishioners were preparing to take a deep breath before plunging into further activities that would make the New Church Fund grow steadily to the required figure in perhaps five years when, in December 1957, Mrs Giesen made her generous and breath-taking gift of £6000.

No pump-priming could have been more effective. Mrs Giesen may well have been pleased with the excitement and the renewed fervour that her gift generated. The 5-year plan was thrown overboard, and the timing was changed to 'as soon as possible'. With more than £12000 in hand, the time for approving plans and calling for tenders was clearly very close. Immediately after the Christmas and New Year holidays another special meeting of parishioners was called, when the plans were fully considered and approved. The parish was to be thoroughly canvassed again, and this was to be preceded by a Parish Dinner, which was in fact held in May 1958. A strong committee under the general chairmanship of Mr Giesen set 'Operation Progress' in motion with the avowed aim of having sufficient funds in hand to permit the new Church to be started that year. "The dinner", as the next Annual Report of the churchwardens put it, "although criticised at the time in certain quarters, proved an outstanding success, and has greatly contributed towards the bonds of family life within the parish." In a more material way it contributed to the success of the canvass, which was sufficiently encouraging to permit the Foundation Stone of the New Church to be laid by Bishop Rich on Saturday, 15 November, 1958.

Meantime vast progress was being made in another sector of the parish activities. When St Paul's became a Parochial District in 1946, Wainuiomata fell within its boundaries and was administered as an Outpost of St Paul's in much the same way as St Paul's in earlier years had been an Outpost of St James's. St John's, Wainuiomata, had its own Church committee which attended as far as possible to its own affairs, and made an appropriate contribution to the funds of the combined district. The vicar of St Paul's was equally vicar of St John's and took services there; and other services were taken by lay readers from St Paul's, and later by Mr Wilkinson, who lived in, and worked for, Wainuiomata. When the history of the Anglican Church in Wainuiomata comes to be written there will be a grand story of local interest and local effort to unfold. Growth of population was as rapid in that valley after 1946 as it had been in the Hutt after 1928; and the energy of

local parishioners kept pace with that growth.

For a time services were held in the local Hall, used the previous evening as a cinema, or perhaps for a dance. Necessarily far from clean, it was not an encouraging place in which to hold Sunday services. But quite soon plans were in hand for a new Church-room on part of the property acquired in 1946. There was, however, a frustrating period before the building was completed and dedicated in February 1952. In 1955, the Wainuiomata committee were considering and eventually buying more sections in the northern part of their widespread township; and such was their growth and progress that in that year they were placed by mutual agreement on an equal status with St Paul's - both sub-districts of the same parochial district. That gave them a vestry and churchwardens in good time to celebrate their 10th birthday on 27th November, 1955.

From that point until 1 June 1959, when Wainuiomata became a separate parochial district, there was a central committee to maintain watch over the financial arrangements of both sub-districts. Thereafter, the history of Wainuiomata is no longer closely linked with that of St Paul's, and we leave it at that point, except to say that the vicarage built next the Church-room in 1957 was first occupied by the curate of St Paul's, who took with him to what was to become his own domain the hard-working and efficient parish assistant - also of this parish.

We return to St Paul's, and the year 1959. An overdraft of up to £10000 was arranged with the Bank, and the vestry approached with confidence the task of paying it off within 4 years at 5%. Contributions through 'Operation Progress' amounted to £3370 for the complete 12 months - a staggering sum compared with annual receipts of not long before, yet less than the sum promised. But realisation of the shares given by Mrs Giesen provided more than £7500, which represented a considerable appreciation in value in about 18 months. The building of the Church went on without incident during 1959; and the vestry could see the prospect of com-

pletion long before the expiry date of September 1960, with an estimated maximum overdraft of £8000. Meantime, early in 1959, Mr Giesen had made a princely gift of £3000 for a Pipe Organ; and, after lengthy consideration of local and U.K. quotations, an order was placed for the construction of the organ with an Auckland firm. The new Church was rising to its stately height in solid reinforced concrete on the corner of the section, while the little old Church, with its tiny belfry and its squat and somewhat drab appearance, nestled against it on the southern side. Next came the Hall, still the pride and joy of the men of the parish, with the old St Paul's House at its far end. And behind the Church the vicarage stood out as a further reminder that here in very truth was the heart and centre of the parish.

Enquiries were already being made about the final disposal of the 52-year-old Church; and an offer was made by our friends of the R.C. Church across the road to buy it for removal. This offer was accepted; and in due course, after the new Church was completed and occupied, the building that had served us so well since 1928 proudly took to the road once more, retraced its steps down Waiwhetu Road to the corner, halted to give one backward look to its old site on White's Lane, then turned away down the Wainui Road to what may well be its last resting place at the parish school.

"After the new Church was completed". The weather was kind that first winter of the building, and progress was ahead of schedule. Contract date was in September; but in fact the Church was dedicated on 15 June of 1960. Meantime the vestry had been considering a Chime of Bells for which provision had been made in the Tower of the Church. Early in 1959 enquiries were made of a firm of Bell-founders in Loughborough, England; but the cost of a full Chime of 8 bells - about £1000 - was more than the vestry thought they should commit the parishioners to while there was still a considerable debt on the Church. But one bell was ordered - the 'E' bell - and it was shipped from England in March 1960 in time for it to ring out the call for parishioners to attend the dedication.

But the Giesens had not yet reached the limit of their astounding generosity. The Pipe Organ was on order, but it would be another two years before it was installed. A full peal, which would carry its message across the parish, especially to an ailing man in Tawa Street, could be brought into operation in less than half the time. So in June 1960 Mr Giesen gave another £1000; the remaining seven bells were immediately ordered, and were in action early in 1961; and Mr Giesen found the extra £47 that they cost over and above his initial gift.

Then in January 1961, Mrs Giesen made a further donation - this time no less than £10000 - which cleared all debt on the Church, provided a large amount for interior furnishings, and left over a fair round sum of £2500 as the 'Winifred L. Giesen Endowment'. The furnishings bought from this gift include a beautiful 45" brass cross and matching candlesticks for the altar, and Wilton carpet - more than 160 yards of it - for the body of the Church, and another 20 pews.

So the new Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Wellington on 1 May 1961. Just one-third of a century had passed since services began in this part of the Valley in the wooden Church-room built largely by the men of the parish. Just one-third of a century - less than half a lifetime - had been needed to raise the area from an Outpost of St James's to a full and independent parish.

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