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THE LADIES OF ALL SAINTS'

Early in 1894 a Branch of the Bloemfontein Mission Association was established in Ficksburg with an initial roll of sixteen members. A Working Guild in connection with the Association was organised to raise funds for the extension of Church work.

This is the first that we hear of an organised group of ladies getting together for church work, although individuals had been hard at it from the St. Columba's days.

The Church Magazine of February 15, 1894, recorded that two magnificent pieces of embroidery (a violet veil and violet burse in silk, worked in gold and coloured silks) had been presented to the church, mainly the delicate workmanship and exquisite skill of Miss Cooke. This was soon followed by two violet alms-bags, of richest silk velvet, each embroidered with a cross worked in bas-relief with white silks, set off with four ruby taches and entwined with the Crown of Thorns.

Later on we learn that on Easter Sunday they used the new white Altar wings, embroidered with appliques of stamped plush bordered with white silk. Also there were white watered silk veil, burse, and alms bags, all of them embroidered with silks and gold, and edged with gilt cable braid.

The Working Guild met, as a general rule, on the Saturday before the first Sunday of every month, gathering for sewing and other work in the School-room from 4 to 6, during which a paper or article was read by one of the members. This was followed by Evensong, Special Mission Service, and short Address in the church. Saturday was chosen as the most convenient day for country members, that they might come in on Saturday afternoon and remain for the Sunday Service. More especially this had the purpose of uniting together all the members of the Association by enabling them to make their communion together, at the early celebration on the first Sunday of the month. At this time the President of the Guild was Mrs. C. Brumage.

When the addition of a Porch and Vestry was mooted, the Working Guild immediately set to work to organise a bazaar, inviting the whole congregation to take part in it. This bazaar took place in the week after Easter Sunday 1895, when 240 pounds was raised, this when a pound was worth a pound. Amongst the items produced for the



Sunday School Outing at "Morgenzon". 1921

stalls were some beautifully etched tea-cloths, an embroidered dress skirt, a Yorkshire landscape in oils, a most handsome bridal doll and some ‘sumptuous cushions’. The ladies presiding over the event were Mrs. Brumage and Mrs. Newberry.

The ladies continued their work in the parish and in 1909 the Vestry asked for a ladies’ committee to be formed to collect the subscriptions of the church members. Mrs. Brumage and Mrs. Harvey were asked to undertake this task. This work was then continued by Mrs. D. Macaskill until 1914, when Miss Rowe took over. Different ladies then continued this task for some years.

The ladies were also involved in the cleaning and keeping of the church and its contents in order. In this regard Miss Phillimore is mentioned in 1912, and Miss Queenie Snell assisted by Olive Trollip in 1913.

On April 23, 1910, Miss Whitley, who had come from England to spend 2 years in S. Africa in order to make known the objects and work of the “Mothers’ Union” and the “Girls Friendly Society”, paid a visit to Ficksburg. A large gathering of ladies assembled in the church grounds to meet her, and she gave a most excellent address. “Miss Whitley also went to Miss Phillimore’s reading class for girls with which she was highly delighted.” Unfortunately for the town, Miss Phillimore was to leave Ficksburg for Grahamstown in 1912.

At the conclusion of Miss Whitley’s meeting, the ladies remained to arrange for a working party to be formed for raising money for the Church. Mrs. Leysath, Mrs. Snell, Mrs. Arnott, Mrs. von Berg, Mrs. Truby, Mrs. Seibert, Mrs. Roth, Mrs. Donaldson and Mrs. Macaskill were elected to be an executive committee. The work party was to meet in the Church Cottage on Saturday afternoons.

The ladies were to meet regularly on Thursday’s at 3 p.m. in the Church Cottage and it was proposed to hold a bazaar near the end of the year. In order to provide the ladies with material for their work, a café chantant was held in the Town Hall.

In 1912 the Ladies Working Party held a very successful bazaar which was opened by the wife of the resident magistrate, Mrs. van Iddekinge. The bazaar brought in a total of over 129 pounds.

Mention has already been made of the decision at the 1914 Synod to allow ladies to take part and vote at Parish Vestry meetings. The first ladies who used their rights did so at the Vestry meeting held on Easter Day April 14, 1915, and the names mentioned in the Vestry Minutes were; Mrs. Arnott, Mrs. Snell, and Miss Rowe.

With many of the men-folk away during the 1914-1918 war it was difficult to keep the parish running smoothly, but ‘the few’ kept the church going.

In 1921 a special meeting of the whole parish confirmed that the yearly Diocesan Assessment should be raised by direct subscription from the members of the

congregation and not from the monies raised from bazaars. This principle comes to the fore again and again in various parishes and should be noted. Funds raised by bazaars and other activities by the Ladies' Guilds should be used for special projects and the general benefit of the church in the parish, apart from a tithe from these funds which may be given to various charities.

In the mean time the ladies had continued to be responsible for the collecting of monthly subscriptions, and around 1929 we find the name of Miss Train being mentioned in this regard.

Mrs. Harcourt Vernon either continued the Working Guild or Work party, or started a new one. She was instrumental in getting the children organised as a work group again, and this did invaluable work. The Children's Working Party had been active in 1910 when they were recorded as working for the Bloemfontein Orphanage.

In 1929 it was decided to establish a Women's Guild and a meeting was convened by Mrs. Harcourt Vernon at Mrs. Leysath's house to put this into effect. Meetings were initially held in the private homes of members, and then later on in the "Summer House" which was in the church grounds. Mrs. Gwen Wille, one of the founding members of the Guild, has written a brief history of the Guild based on the minutes. This was written up in 1979 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Guild, and then brought up-to-date by Mrs. Wille in 1990 and published as a booklet in 1991 as part of the All Saints' Centenary activities. Initially the Work Party activities were continued side by side with those of the Guild, and at the 1932 Vestry Meeting separate accounts were submitted.

The 1930's were very difficult times for the parish and the Women's Guild played an invaluable part in helping to raise funds for the continued running of the parish. The Guild held bazaars and jumble sales which, although not raising as much money as those mentioned previously, were very good considering the poor economic climate of the 1930's. An interesting inclusion in their fund-raising at the bazaars were the teas, as, not only was tea served at the bazaar itself, but tea was taken round the town, the "waitresses" being girls from the Girl Guides organisation.

Certainly one of the highlights of these activities must have been the fete held in the garden of "The Gables", Dr. Arnott's house. The usual Cake and Candy stall's, White Elephant stall, and Dips were organised, as well as competitions such as clock-golf, penny-on-the-square, shooting gallery and coconut shy. In addition there were sports, such as the favourite sack race, obstacle and potato races, and a "ladies-horse-race". To round things off there was also a Pierrot troupe.

The spiritual side was not forgotten at the Guild meetings, as the Guild asked Canon Vernon to conduct a short service after each meeting, and this was continued by

the Reverend Findley after he became Rector. It was also customary to hold a corporate communion service, before the Guild meeting, every quarter. This spiritual side of what is actually a church association, seems to have become a bit neglected later on, with certain members feeling that the Guild should be purely a social and service club. This caused the Reverend Mr. Wheat to suggest that the spirit of the Guild was emphasising the Martha rather than the Mary side of their natures, and proposed a church service in connection with their meetings. This was started but unfortunately the Guild felt that Mr. Wheat's services were rather long, so they decided to have a special Guild communion once a month.

It is most unfortunate that the All Saints' Guild records for the first four years were lost, as it is now difficult to record, accurately, their beginnings. The first set of minutes which we still have is that for the 41st meeting held in Mrs. L. Sorour's house on Friday, December 8, 1933. Working backwards, and excluding January and July (although in 1933 and 1932 a July meeting WAS held), one arrives at the first meeting being held in December 1929. Mrs. Gwen Wille remembers the inaugural meeting being held late in 1929, and certainly the All Saints' financial report for 1930 records a sum of 37 pounds received from the "Ladies Guild". However, the 45th Meeting, held on May 11, 1934, is recorded as the fourth anniversary meeting, and the guild continued to celebrate their anniversary in May each year. Also, if one takes into consideration that meetings were held in July, working back results in the first meeting being held in May 1930. It is possible, therefore, that the gathering at Mrs. Leysath's house was to discuss the formation of a Guild but that the first official meeting of the Guild was in May 1930.

Another activity organised by the Guild in those early years was an annual Christmas party for the children belonging to the church. In 1936 this was held in the Town Hall and presents were given to all the children. They were entertained by Mr. Billie Orrock and Miss Joan Anderson with Mrs. Short helping with the music. Naturally goodies such as ice cream were also part of the day.

The end of 1936 also saw the death of Canon Harcourt Vernon, which meant that Mrs. Vernon, the Life President, was absent for some time. Her Girls' Work Party was continued, however, by Mrs. Lloyd, Mrs. Louw, and Mrs. Leysath, although on a more modest scale.

Other activities of the Guild of a more social nature included entertaining the Methodist ladies and the Presbyterian ladies to tea, and the new Rector was received with a public welcome party organised by the Guild.

Charitable activities included assisting a lady, who suffered from tuberculosis, with a financial supplementation, and making an allowance to a widow and her children.

An interesting point which arises from the old minutes is that members were recorded under their husband's initials or names. That is, reference would be made to Mrs. Carl Wille, for instance, or Mrs. Jack Tennent. How our customs have changed, not only had there been a change to using the lady's name, but formality has dropped away as well, so that minutes might refer just to June Berend or Cedar Sorour. In fact, some secretaries have queried whether it was necessary even to mention the surname, "as everyone knows who is meant". Certainly this editor believes we should continue the use of surnames as well, as in 50 or even 100 year's time it might be difficult for someone reading the minutes to know who was meant.

So, over the years, produce sales followed annual bazaars, to be followed by fete's and cake sales. All to the benefit of the All Saints' Church and selected charities. In addition there were always some members who found delight in using their God-given talents to sew and do similar work on Altar cloths and other church linen.

At the 218th Meeting on May 11, 1951, the Rector, the Reverend Wheat, was requested to compile a prayer especially for the Guild. This he duly did and the prayer was used for the first time at the 219th Meeting on 8 June 1951.

Each year, at the May meeting, the anniversary was remembered until 1946, when the minutes of the 169th meeting held on 10th May referred to the meeting as being both the Annual General Meeting and also the anniversary of the Guild. By 1947 the Annual General Meeting made no reference to an anniversary. In 1950 someone remembered that May was the anniversary of the Guild, but thereafter no mention is made of it until 1955, when the 25th birthday party was held at the meeting of 13th May, and Mrs. Lloyd, a founder member, recalled the founding of the Guild.

In 1968 it was decided to bring the financial year into line with that of the Parish Council, which now ended their year in December. The Annual General Meeting was therefore held in December 1968 and the Guild seemed to move further away from remembering the Guild Anniversary date.

However the minutes record that a 40th Birthday party was held on May 8, 1970, and Mrs. Wille gave a talk on the history of the Guild.

The Guild continued to meet regularly and to work for the church and in 1985 a bazaar was planned in which the ladies from Clocolan, Marquard and Fouriesburg were to contribute and assist. Unfortunately this co-operation did not come off and the proceeds were divided between All Saints' Guild and St. George's Guild.

The ladies also started working on new kneelers for the church during 1985 and a progressive supper was planned and carried out in November. As the Mission team from St. Paul's College came to the parish the ladies were very involved in the catering for the various functions.

Renovations to the Church Hall were carried out and financed by the Guild in 1986 and new plastic chairs were purchased in place of the old wooden ones which were starting to collapse when the ladies least expected it - one unfortunate lady was dumped on the floor during a serious discussion, but fortunately no one was seriously hurt.

Mrs. Gwen Wille had been a foundation member of the Guild and so in 1987 she was made a life member and presented with an illuminated address.

For a number of years an attempt had been made to accumulate recipes to be published in book form and this was finalised in 1987 with the publication of a booklet titled "Saintly Foods".

Flowers have always been dear to the heart of members of the Guild and many are members of the local Horticultural Society, so when the Bloemfontein Cathedral held a Spring Carnival in which one of the items was a "Home and Garden" flower display in the Cathedral, the ladies were pleased to accept an invitation to take part. Their theme was a text from the Bible and Ficksburg took the honours with Mrs. Alice Tennent taking first prize and Mrs. Annette Barrett the third prize. The second prize was won by a lady who had previously lived in Ficksburg.

A very successful luncheon was organised by the Guild after the Patronal Festival Service on the 30 October 1988, when the meal was served in the Church Gardens. The Venerable John Davis from Bloemfontein was the celebrant and preacher at the Service.

Various guest speakers addressed the Guild from time to time and in 1988 these included the Ficksburg Social Worker - Mrs. Suzette du Plooy, and in 1989 Mrs. Jane McPherson from Tweespruit spoke about Kupagani, while Miss Cate Ogilvey, the Rotary exchange student from Australia gave an enlightening talk on her experiences as an exchange student.

The All Saints' Ladies Guild were very involved with the move to start a Senior Citizens Service Centre in Ficksburg in 1990, and members of the Guild played a vital role in the initial stages although the Afrikaans church community eventually took control of the organisation.

The old Harmonium had been showing its age in a number of ways and it was generally felt that a new organ was required, and with the foundation of a good donation from a parish family as a base, the ladies started working towards assisting the organ fund. Their efforts, plus further donations from parishioners, enabled the parish to purchase the new Alan Organ in 1991.

The parish luncheon in the church grounds had been so successful in 1988 that it was decided to include a similar luncheon at the start of the year long centenary celebrations on the day of the Patronal Festival, November 4, 1990. The preacher at the

service was the Dean of Bloemfontein, Father Paddy Glover, and he and his wife were guests at the most enjoyable luncheon organised by the ladies.