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## OF BUILDINGS AND THINGS

The Reverend Meyer wrote in his letter of January 1884 which has been previously referred to, "Thus I found it (the Church), and you would be surprised to see what a dear little place it makes, and how churchlike everything looks in it. There is a proper altar, seven feet long, with a little wooden cross, two small candlesticks, altar vases and dossal, with red curtains each side, and a credence table. We follow the cathedral use in Bloemfontein."

We had the dais and altar steps floored and carpeted for Christmas. The little building has a thatch roof and wooden cross; and standing near a large willow, it has a very neat and rustic appearance." This, then, was St. Columba's Church, Ficksburg.

It is interesting to speculate on the reason for dedicating this church to St. Columba, and the following extract from the Quarterly Paper of the Orange Free State Mission of May, 1868, just may have some bearing on the matter.

"There is a quiet spot where the good work of Bishop Twells is often thought of, and where a desire has been felt to assist it. This spot is S. Columba's College, near Dublin. We know that, as one of the Bishop's earliest spheres of labour, it is affectionately remembered by him, and that though his pupils and colleagues have long since passed on to other fields of life, many of them, as well as of the present members, feel the link that connected him with their college, and are proud of the higher position which he now occupies."

The article continues by stating that the annual offertory in the chapel would be devoted to the Bloemfontein Mission, and that they had selected the new church at Philippolis as the recipient of that year's offertory, and that future offertories would be sent to other places in the Orange Free State. Is it just possible that the church in Ficksburg was the subject of a contribution, thus bringing about the decision to dedicate the church to St. Columba?

We have seen that a parsonage was bought for the new parson who was to live in Ficksburg and the Reverend Mr. Meyer described it in his letter of January 1884 as follows.

"The parsonage is what we call here a large house, four rooms, a passage, and

a kitchen; the rooms are of good size. The house was very dirty and dilapidated when I first came; mud floors, broken windows, no locks, no steps, mud walls, no ceiling, and horrid insects by thousands. Outside, the building looked as bad; no guttering, the brick window sills washed out, the brick and mortar of the walls worn away in places. So I had to set to work with a heavy heart and light purse to mend and finish the house, which cost about 250 pounds. But now it is a very respectable house, all the rooms are floored and ceiled, and the walls of all but one room painted; the outside has been roughcast..."

When it was decided to build the new church of All Saints' the Building Committee met several times. Thereupon Mr. William Dickens, a builder in Ficksburg, was offered the existing church and the erf on which it stood in part payment for the building of the new church. Mr. Dickens accepted this proposal. "The church to be built of burnt brick, of dimensions fifty feet long by twenty feet wide and fourteen feet high with an apsidal East end, each side of the apse being ten feet. The brickwork to be eighteen inches thick throughout". The building was to be completed within six months.

By November 1890 the foundation of the church had been laid, and on January 9, 1891 the foundation stone was laid by the Reverend Father Douglas, Canon of Bloemfontein and Rector of Modderpoort.

"It was eventually decided to substitute a wooden floor for the proposed antheap one, and all the woodwork was entrusted by Mr. Dickens to Mr. Carmichael who did it excellently but slowly".

Mr. Michael Wille relates how he was told that the parishioners helped in the building of the church after working hours.

Having discussed the matter at the Vestry meeting three years earlier, it was proposed on 8 May 1895 that the porch and vestry should be built and that a Mr. Harvey could do the building. Consequently a request dated July 1, 1895 was sent to the Bishop asking for the issue of a faculty to build a porch and vestry for the chapel of All Saints', Ficksburg. The request was signed by the Vicar, F. M. Lane, and Mr. H. Foxcroft, Chapelwarden. The new porch and vestry were begun in the week of June 23, 1895.

On July 27, 1910 a very enjoyable dance was held in the Town Hall with the object of raising money for the church to be repainted.

By 1929 the time had come for general renovations to the church and in 1930 this was started. This included painting, the insertion of tie-rods and "letting the electric wire tubes into the walls".

Repairs to the plaster in the church were a continual necessity and in 1953 it was suggested that the church should be panelled instead of replastering. It is interesting

to note that the suggestion was to panel the church with "rhino board". No panelling had been carried out by 1956 and it was then proposed by Mr. S. Sorour that a fund be started to build a new church. Although some fundraising was started in this connection nothing definite was done about a new church, repairs to the existing church and the addition of a vestry taking precedence.

At the Annual Vestry meeting in 1962 Mr. Charles Bowie addressed the meeting and after bringing the meeting's attention to the existing New Church Building Fund, stated that steps would have to be taken as the life of the present building was ending, although it would still be usable for a while, giving time for consideration of the New Church to be made. In his opinion the existing building would need major reconstruction and not merely repair and alteration. After lengthy discussion no definite decision was reached by the meeting.

During 1970 agreement was finally reached to panel the walls of the church instead of replastering. In addition, the wall between the church and the vestibule-vestry section at the west end would be opened up and a new vestry built. As usual, the decision was followed by a lot of inactivity and it was 1972 before work started.

Neon lighting now replaced the old electric lamps except for one of the sanctuary lamps which was hung in the entrance to the church. The floors were also sanded and sealed with a proprietary sealer. Wooden tops to the half-walls which had been left to separate the main body of the church and the entrance were made although these took a couple of years to be completed. The renovations and building of the new vestry on the south side was finally completed in 1973. Finally curtains were hung "between the nave and the vestibule". During these rather major renovations church services were held in the Methodist church.

When we enquire about the "Grove Church" in the Clocolan district we learn that Brother Arthur of St. Augustine's, Modderpoort helped them to convert an 'ordinary' dwelling house into a little chapel, the original kitchen being converted to the vestry.

Mr. Vincent wrote: "The old square windows were removed, and six orthodox lancet windows put in. The floor was of earth, so a boarded floor was put down and the chancel raised. The walls outside, plastered with lime, and the inside plaster has all been removed and done up fresh". Various friends in England and elsewhere sent Altar Linen, Altar Frontal, Communion Service, Cross, Candlesticks, and other items.

One is struck, when reading Mr. Vincent's letters, at the endeavour to "do it right" even to the replacement of the square windows with "orthodox lancet windows". I wonder if we would bother today, were we to use a converted, rented house ?

The "Quarterly Papers" of October 1903 gave the following extract from the

"Bloemfontein Post" to describe St. Saviour's Church at Prynnesberg.

"The Church is a most beautiful stone building of Early English architecture, with cusped window heads and abundance of carving in stone (executed by Mr. Cooper) of the very finest description. A stone chancel-arch of graceful proportions springs from the carved capitals of stone pillars at either side, with rather an elaborately timbered roof, whose principal rafters rest upon carved corbels, and whose intermediate rafters are carried on arches ornamented above with open perpendicular work (executed by Mr. Harvey). The font designed by Miss Newberry, is of an unique and beautiful character, made up of three clustered pilasters with the carved capitals supporting the bowl. The whole work has been carried out for Chas. Newberry, Esq., and presented by him to the Church of the Province of South Africa, and will be a great boon to the neighbourhood."

The building which we know today as "The Hall" at All Saints' does not have its origins recorded. This small building, in the grounds of the church near the Rectory, probably had its origins in a room or couple of rooms in which the visiting priest from Modderpoort could stay in the days before the Parsonage was bought.

It may also have been where the Reverend Olive lived when he was resident in Ficksburg, as the Parsonage was at that stage let out. On the other hand he may have owned his own house in town, although that is unlikely and no mention of it is found in the records. The first reference which MAY refer to this building was in 1897, when at the Vestry it was proposed "..... that a convenience be put up for the Cottage". This was erected against the fence below the hall. In 1910, again, when discussing the Ladies Work Party which had just restarted, it was mentioned that they were meeting in the Church Cottage.

Parishioners still remember the building being occupied, however, and amongst these occupants at one time or another were Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd, who owned the Ficksburg News at one time, and Mr. and Mrs. Webster.

In those earlier days the entrance to the building was from the east end, and one had to approach up an incline to enter. This entrance was closed later when it was turned into a parish hall.

In 1951 the building was being used as a Study and Workshop, and at the Reverend Chatfield's suggestion, work was put in hand to turn it into a small parish hall. This work included two windows being fitted, the middle wall removed, the ceiling repaired, the fireplace moved, plastering to be done inside and outside and the guttering repaired.

In 1973 plans were made for the addition of a kitchenette and toilets. These changes and general renovations took place at the same time as the building of the new

Rectory.

There was at one time a structure in the church grounds known as "the Summerhouse". It stood approximately where the Garden of Remembrance is today, and consisted of eight poles holding up a thatched roof. The floor was raised from the ground and was of wood flooring. Estimates of its size give it at about three meters by six meters, and it had canvas sides which could be rolled down to keep out the wind.

The origin of the building seems to have gone back to the days when parishioners from the farms used to come in for the church services and stay for the day, bringing picnic lunches.

In the 1926 Vestry minutes reference was made to the Sunday scholars in providing funds for the erection of "the substantial shelter in the Rectory grounds," and one wonders if this was not the Summerhouse, as the Rectory grounds and the church grounds were extensions of each other.

The Summerhouse gave a shelter in which to sit, talk, and eat. Once motor cars came to town, or should we say, came to the farms, in earnest, the need tended to fall away, but the Summerhouse continued to be used for other purposes, such as Ladies' Guild Meetings, and other activities. In 1952, after the changes to the Hall made that building a suitable place to hold meetings, the Summerhouse fell into disuse. In time it deteriorated and was finally demolished in 1973, some of the wood going to Gumtree and the rest sold to Mr. Herne.

Dr. Taylor's house was on the erf in Lang street from Piet Retief to Kestell Streets, the house still standing at No.31. Other doctors took over the property until it was bought by Miss Fawkes who built on the section adjoining Piet Retief Street. This house was known as the Loquats, and it was eventually bought by Mr. and Mrs. Granville Harcourt Vernon for Canon and Mrs. Harcourt Vernon to stay in as the existing Rectory in Piet Retief Street was considered too damp. The house passed into the hands of Miss Dorothy Vernon, who in turn sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Jack Tennent.

The Parsonage was rented out during Canon Vernon's stay in the Loquats, but taken over by the Reverend Findley when he and his wife came to Ficksburg in 1937. In 1941 the Ladies Guild agitated for a new Rectory, the minutes of the Parish Council of February 1943 recorded that a letter from the Ladies Guild "briefly urged the council to take immediate steps for the better accommodating of the rector and his family." Furthermore the letter said that, "they feel most strongly that the present rectory is a disgrace to the parish."

The ladies' comments were taken seriously and consideration was given to

building a new rectory or buying another house. Unfortunately the cost of a new rectory appeared to be beyond the means of the congregation and after trying to get some support from Clocolan and Marquard towards the cost of buying a house, without success, it was decided that the least that could be done was renovating the existing rectory and improving it. This was to include the addition of an extra room and a stoep, which it was later decided to enclose with glass. The Clocolan congregation agreed to contribute towards the cost of these improvements.

By the time the Reverend Wheat arrived in 1946 further renovations to the rectory were necessary. After these were carried out the roof was still found to be leaking, the explanation given by the builders being, "the rafters are too rotten to hold the screws".

In 1947 the proposal was again put forward to build a new Rectory, members of Vestry maintaining that no further money be spent on trying to renovate the existing Rectory. A concerted effort was made over the next few years to raise funds for the purpose of building but no other action was taken.

In 1950 the Horticultural Society made an offer to buy a small portion of the Rectory erf for the purpose of building a hall. After much discussion this proposal was not accepted, but in the process the Rectory erf was tentatively divided up on paper as follows; "A", the top third, next to the Trade School grounds, measuring 150 x 100 feet; "B", the next third down, of the same size; "C", the half of the remainder, on the corner and including the outbuildings, measuring 75 x 100 feet; and "D", the remaining sixth, of the same size, on which the Rectory stands." It was decided to test the value of this property on the open market, in portions and as a whole.

Various offers were made for the ground and while discussions surrounding the matter of a new Rectory were taking place the possible purchase of a house belonging to Mr.D. Tobias in Zon Street came before the council which again led to a complete re-thinking of the matter. In the middle of all this, the Reverend Wheat accepted the position of Rector of Kroonstad, leaving Ficksburg in the middle of 1951. His place in Ficksburg was taken by the Reverend B. G. Chatfield.

A Vestry Meeting was called at which everyone agreed that the building of a new Rectory was not feasible. The final result was that the old Rectory was sold and the house in Zon Street purchased.

Painting and repairs of the Zon Street rectory were carried out from time to time in the 1960's and in September 1969 it was suggested that this rectory be sold instead of carrying out major alterations to the building. A special vestry meeting was held on October 25, 1970 to approve the sale of the Zon Street rectory and to build a new rectory on the church property in Lang Street. Further vestry meetings were considered

necessary in 1971 and the old rectory was finally sold in July 1973, the rector and his family moving into temporary accommodation in Visser street.

Mr. Derrick Macaskill reminisces over the days he spent bulldozing the grounds in preparation for the new rectory building while scores of onlookers stood on the sidelines. Building of the new rectory and alterations to the hall were started in October 1973, the building contractor being Mr. Willem Smit. The building was not completed in the six months stipulated in the contract and it was July 1974 before Canon Shepperson and his family could move in. This was to be only a short stay for them as they left Ficksburg in December of the same year.

Mrs. Helen Dickson provided a plan of the rectory and surrounding gardens with suggestions for the layout of the garden. This included brick and gravel pathways and stone supporting walls. Other workers in the grounds included Mr. H. Schultd, who cleared tree stumps and trimmed the oak trees, and Mr. R. Cierenberg who ploughed the grounds.

The official opening of the Rectory by the Bishop was held on Saturday, 19 October 1974.

The laying of the brick paths and driveway by Mrs. Helen Dickson was completed before the Reverend Daile Pillans and his wife moved into the new Rectory.

The Rectory courtyard was improved in September 1978 with a face-brick wall and grille gate in the west end, and a pergola supported on piers. Misunderstanding regarding money spent on brick paving gave rise to "some very acrimonious and heated discussion."

In 1979 cracks started to appear in the walls of the passage. This was eventually found to be due to a burst pipe under the cement in the courtyard, but there was a lot of investigation and many theories aired before the cement was dug up in 1980 and the burst pipe found. The cement was removed, the pipe was repaired, and the courtyard was re-bricked with loose bricks on sand.

In 1898 it was recorded that the congregation had for some time believed that the Church windows ought to be coloured in some way so as to subdue the very intense light.

Promises were made, books of coloured designs were obtained, and even estimates, and four windows promised by gentlemen ("rarely attending the services, and who certainly are not those incommoded by the glare", according to the Vicar). Finally promises were received for the whole of the "glacier" coloured windows for the Church. Two were memorials - one given by Mrs. Von Berg, the other by Mrs. Campbell, a third was the gift of Mr. Charles Stevens, another of Dr. Taylor and Mr. R. Wyatt-Smith, and

two of Mr. Charles Newberry. "They will be provided in new steel frames with suitable ventilators, instead of the old wooden ones, and will have fends or guards to prevent breakage from outside. The choice of subjects, owing to the size and nearness of the windows, was very limited. Two are of the Annunciation, one of the Resurrection, one of the Ascension, and two of Angels with harps and trumpets. The windows themselves cost about ten pounds each."

These windows were a "sandwich" of glass with the paper design between, and according to various reports, the paper designs had to be replaced from time to time.

During the general re-arrangement of the church carried out by the Reverend Dennis Stewart, he remarked that the condition of the windows left much to be desired. It was agreed that the glass should be replaced with plain glass and Mr. Bowie investigated the most suitable screens to subdue the light.

The minutes record that; "Miss Helen Tennent was trying to find suitable paint for using on glass and would execute symbolic designs as soon as she was able." Miss Tennent exhibited her designs on the notice board for all the congregation to see and, although Mr. Bowie was not too happy with the idea of the windows being painted as he "felt it was unworthy", the windows were duly painted with the symbolic designs and the Rector expressed his delight with the work done by Miss Tennent.

In 1972 Miss Tennent, now Mrs. John Dickson, offered to re-do the church windows. The paint that was have been used proved to be unsatisfactory, and Mrs. Dickson proposed an alternative method. She drew up designs for the windows but on submission to the Bishop they were thought to be too intricate. However, at the Vestry Meeting in March 1975 it was reported that plans had been approved and the Parish Church Council was asked to apply for a faculty.

The unique and unusual windows have since then become a tourist attraction for visitors to Ficksburg. Each window was first designed on paper. Window glass was then cut to the shape of the window and placed over the design. Glass of all colours was collected from all sources, including bottles, dishes and tumblers, as well as some imported glass, so that various colours and shades would be available. Placing larger pieces of glass between layers of newspaper and in canvas, these were broken to give smaller pieces to select for the detail which then began to take form.

These pieces were then glued into place on the window glass, following the design underneath. In many cases glass piece was layered upon glass piece, giving a three-dimensional appearance to the final picture, as well as building up to the required shade.

The work took a year to complete, various parishioners donating the money for the materials so that each window, ten in all, is dedicated to a family or member of the

congregation.

As the sun moves during the day, so the Agapanthus, Protea, Lobelias, Erythrina and other flowers come ablaze to the viewer inside the church, for these were the subject of the windows, not scriptural scenes, but the beauty of the flowers found in the Ficksburg area. No wonder the horticultural societies from all over South Africa include a visit to All Saints' Church in their itinerary of the area.

Unfortunately that same sunshine which highlights the beauty of the windows causes the glue to deteriorate and pieces of the coloured glass are already becoming loose and inevitably some pieces are swept up by the cleaners. In addition one of the windows was cracked as early as 1977, and it was decided to wire it closed.