



# 6

## BRINDISI AND FOURIESBURG

In his book, "Doctor to Basuto, Boer and Briton", Dr Henry Taylor relates of his arrival in South Africa. On his arrival in Bethlehem his bag was seized by a man whose name turned out to be Middleton. The son of this Mr. Middleton took Dr. Taylor to Mr. C. Middleton's house in Basutoland, a few hundred yards from the Caledon river, where, instead of a large comfortable bed in a large home which were the expectations of this newcomer to the country, Dr. Taylor was kindly offered a share of the floor space in the store along with other travellers.

This is our first reference to a name with which the Church in the Fouriesburg area has been associated right from the beginning through to the present day. An example of a Sunday routine by the Vicar of Bethlehem is given for June 3, 1894, in "The Church Magazine" for that month. "Mattins were said at 11 o'clock, and was followed by a celebration of Holy Communion, when seven persons received the Blessed Sacrament. Evensong was said at 3 o'clock, to allow persons coming from a distance time to reach home before sunset. Both services were well attended, several of the congregation coming from Fouriesburg; others from Basutoland. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were most kind, making everyone (as usual) welcome."

In his letter of June 21, 1896, published in the Quarterly Papers of July of that year, Bishop Hicks wrote, "On Tuesday, June 9, I went to Brindisi, where I was met by the Rector of Bethlehem, who holds services there periodically. Brindisi is a large trading establishment belonging to Mr. Charles Middleton, a loyal and earnest churchman, who entertained us most hospitably. The next day we drove to Fouriesburg, a small township which has sprung up in the last four years. Here we breakfasted, and I confirmed two persons, and then we went on to Bethlehem."

The Reverend W.H. Ball, writing from Bethlehem in 1897, relates that on first arrival in Bethlehem he paid only quarterly visits to Brindisi, but later added Fouriesburg as well as Senekal and Reitz as places that HAD to be visited.

In 1899 he wrote of the valuable work Mrs. Snell had carried out in organising two concerts in Fouriesburg with the help of Mr. C.E. Middleton and Company from Brindisi, in order to raise funds for a Harmonium. He writes in the October "Church

Magazine”, “It is sorely needed. After a long drive, perhaps in the face of a strong wind, it is most trying to have to visit the village, then take service, read the psalms, canticles, lessons, preach, and probably START, if not SING, all the hymns.”

In 1906 services were being taken in Fouriesburg by the Reverend W. Stevenson of Sekubu. He took services once a month for a while at least, and in return the people at Fouriesburg guaranteed him 50 pounds per annum and expenses, thus providing the salaries of two catechists.

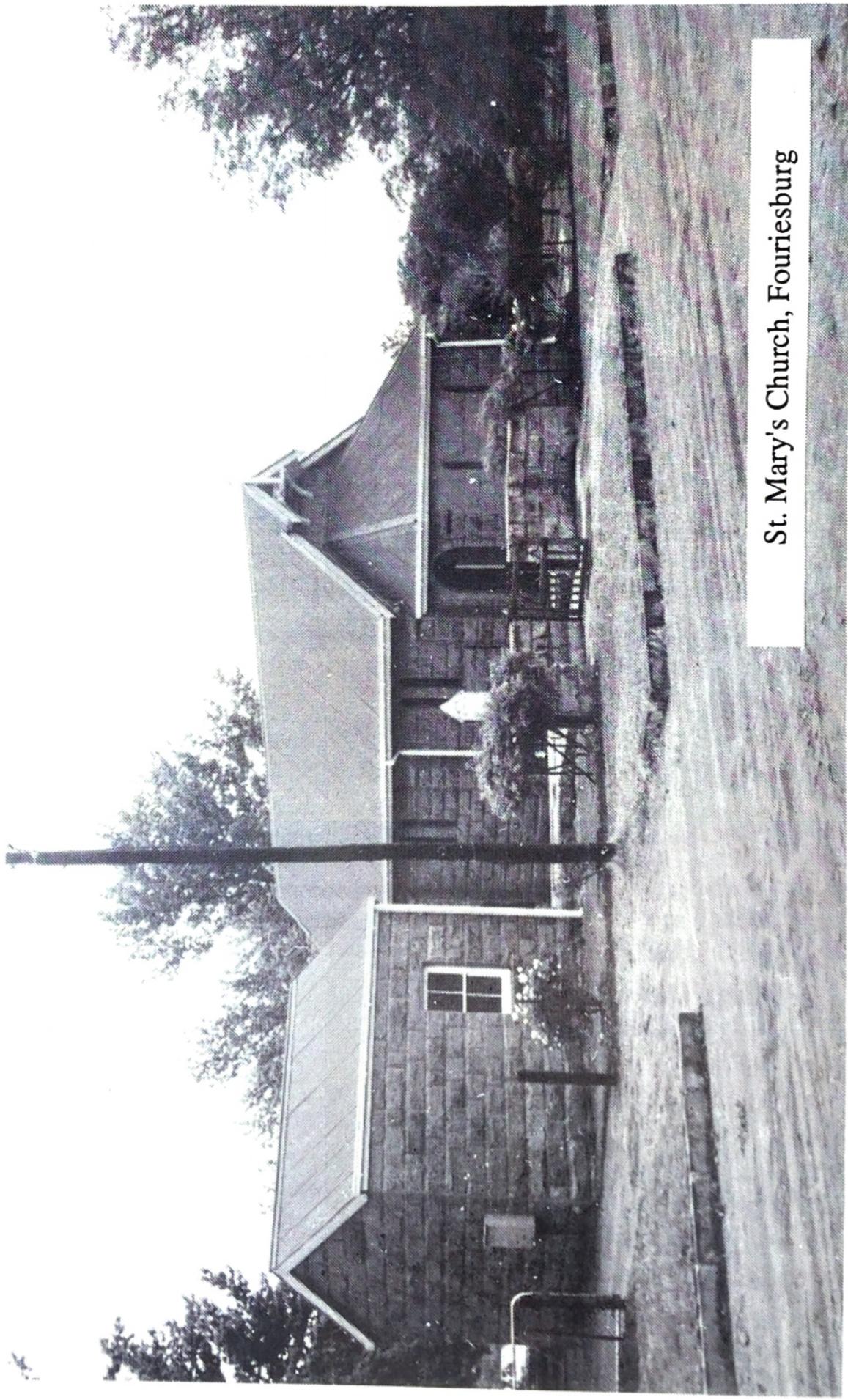
However, in 1907 the Rector of Bethlehem, Archdeacon Vincent, had resumed taking services at Fouriesburg. He was assisted by the Reverend W.O. Wellington who came out to South Africa in that year.

In October 1908 we find that the “Fouriesburg Christy Minstrel Troupe” gave the proceeds of their entertainment to the Anglican Church Building Fund, and just before the service on Sunday, June 13, 1909, Archdeacon Vincent convened a meeting of the Anglican Church congregation and supporters with the object of ascertaining whether an effort could be made to provide Fouriesburg with a small church. It was estimated that this would cost about 400 pounds, with another 50 pounds for furnishing. Services had, up to this date, all been held in the Town Hall. Those present were in sympathy with the idea and a committee was formed of about 16 men with a ladies committee of about 12. The first joint meeting was held in the Court House on Wednesday, June 16, at 3 p.m.

The Foundation Stone of St. Mary’s Church was laid on Wednesday, November 12, 1911, by Mrs. C.E. Middleton. Mr. Andrews carved the stone as a gift to the Church. Almost all the congregation from town and country were present as well as those referred to as “friends”, and a special service was conducted by Archdeacon Vincent.

By April 16, 1912, the church had been completed and was dedicated by Bishop Arthur Chandler “to the Glory and Worship of God and the memory of St. Mary the Virgin.” The Church Magazine reported the event, saying that a large congregation had attended, many coming from as far as Bethlehem. The Reverend B.L. Hope acted as Bishop’s Chaplain, and Archdeacon Vincent and Canon Orford also took part.

In 1914 the name of Middleton again crops up when the ordination of Edmund Middleton to the diaconate was fixed for March 8. The Quarterly Papers of April 1914 reported as follows: “Edmund Middleton, son of a much respected Free State family, was ordained Deacon on the Second Sunday in Lent (March 8) by Bishop Balfour. The Chancellor, Canon Orford, presented the candidate and preached the sermon, expressing thankfulness that they were that day setting apart for the ministry of Christ’s Church one born in the country....”



St. Mary's Church, Fouriesburg

After ordination Mr. Middleton, who attended St. Paul's, Grahamstown, went to Mafeteng to take up work there under Canon Ford. He was ordained priest in 1916.

The St. Mary's Women's Guild came into being at a meeting held in 1957 at Mrs. Frost's house, and conducted by Mrs. Webb. However, as with the other churches, the ladies had been involved with the church activities and fund raising right from the early days of the church in Fourniesburg. Unfortunately, no minutes of those early days are now available to tell us of their deeds.

At the meeting on May 22, 1957, Mrs. Webb explained the purpose of a Women's Church Guild and it was agreed that the women of St. Mary's and friends should form such a guild. Officers were then elected with Mrs. E.R. Middleton as President, Mrs. Thresher as Vice-President and Mrs. Gasson was elected Secretary/Treasurer.

The Guild immediately started making plans for fund raising. The first project was a jumble sale, while a Christmas play was also enthusiastically proposed, to be held on December 18th in the Town Hall. The money from this tableau went to St. Faith's Home in Bloemfontein.

Meetings were held each month except the school holiday months of July and January, to be held at different members' homes at 10 a.m. and with two ladies being responsible for teas. However, it would seem that most meetings were held at Mrs. Frost's house.

Initial items presented to the church were a candle snuffer and tapers donated by one of the Guild members, and a new carpet runner and underfelt. Charities included the Widows and Orphans fund and the Modderpoort Clinic Appeal. Old Christmas cards were also collected for "Cripple Care" in East London.

It was decided to discuss different topics at Guild meetings and the first topic chosen was Church Vestments. This triggered off a move to work on the St. Mary's vestments, but the discussion of various topics did not really get off the ground. The Guild also accepted the responsibility of paying the organist, and purchasing new Prayer and Hymn books.

In 1961 the Guild took on the organisation for the celebration of the jubilee year of St. Mary's. To start with they arranged for Mr. Reuder of Ficksburg to make a Reredos for the church, to be paid for by the Guild. This was Dedicated by the Bishop on October 15th. A Finger Supper was arranged by the Guild on 11th November to which all the Fourniesburg V.I.P.'s were invited, as well as past ministers and Church Wardens. This was followed by a play titled "See How They Run", produced by the Reverend Mr. Stewart with the Ficksburg Dramatic Society. This was acclaimed a great success.

In 1962 the Ficksburg Dramatic Society, amongst whom were many members of the All Saints' congregation, gave a production of "Ten Little Niggers", which was thoroughly enjoyed by all who could attend.

By 1962 the Guild were feeling that they could not achieve as much as they had in the past as they had lost a number of members, including Mrs. J. Middleton, who had resigned. A number of others had either left Fouriesburg or died. However, in 1963 the Guild finally took the plunge and arranged for the "Womens World Day of Prayer" service to be held in St. Mary's church. Mrs. Pat Stewart led the service and in spite of all the misgiving which the Guild had felt at arranging an ecumenical event of this nature in the Anglican Church, it was a great success and extra chairs had to be borrowed from the school.

The Guild still managed to reach very high fund raising targets, with activities such as jumble sales and cake stalls. They contributed towards the Ordination Fund and the Church Assessment, which was greatly appreciated by the Parish Council. It should also be noted that it was quite routine to invite the "Padre" to lunch after the Sunday services, a tradition which was maintained for many years.

As with the St. George's Guild, the St. Mary's Guild were persuaded to become members of the Anglican Women's Fellowship in 1970, and in June 1971 a gathering of all the women of the Parish, including Ficksburg, Marquard, Cloolan, Gumtree, Bethlehem and Harrismith, was held at the home of Mrs. Thresher at "Klein Thaba Bosigo". The meeting was addressed by the Provincial Chairlady, Mrs. Ferguson, and the Vice-Chair, the Rev. Mother Mary Ruth.

In 1971 St. Mary's celebrated its 60th anniversary and the St. Mary's Women's Guild donated a notice board in commemoration. The Anniversary celebrations consisted of a lunch held at "Wynford" after the service on the 5th Sunday in October. The plan had been to play tennis, bowls, etc., but a severe hailstorm prevented this. However, an interesting talk on "the old days", was given by Mr. Charles Middleton and his family.

In 1972 cloakroom additions to the vestry were completed, and it was about this time that the Guild started to make enquiries about the possible use of the vacant erven next to the church as a long term project. The two erven were then donated to the church by Mr. Charles Middleton. Among the ideas for the use of the erven were, the building of a holiday cottage for clergy, and flats for the elderly.

In 1972 the ladies took up cudgels in connection with the new Fouriesburg by-pass road. Their concern was for the two intersections at which the Fouriesburg traffic would enter the by-pass. They felt these were dangerous and that fly-over bridges should be built. They therefore set out to write letters to the local Member of Parliament, the

A.A., Rondalia, and others. Encouraging replies were received from the A.A., and Rondalia, as well as from Mr. Keyter M.P. The Provincial Roads Engineer, Bloemfontein, in his reply, stated that the crossings were perfectly satisfactory. The Guild considered this reply unsatisfactory.

Also in 1972 the Guild started to sponsor a local child named 'Dominic'. He had been living on one of the farms in the Fourniesburg district but his mother had gone away, his father had been killed by lightning, and he and two brothers were being cared for by his grandfather, who was going blind. The boy was to be sent to school and the teacher was asked to report on his progress periodically. Clothes were bought for him, as well as books.

On September 12, 1972, the Guild paid a visit to Witzieshoek, to see the work being done there. They felt that this was a worthwhile and informative day. The Ficksburg ladies also invited the St. Mary's A.W.F. to tea in October.

Official records of the years until 1985 are now missing, but in that year the Methodists, who use St. Mary's Church for Sunday services, were instrumental in having electricity installed in the church.

In 1987 the 75th anniversary of St. Mary's Church was celebrated with a braai in the church grounds. This has been followed up in subsequent years with an annual picnic braai at the farm "Ettrick", home of Margie and Denton Osler.

The Bible Study Group meetings had grown spasmodic owing to absenteeism and illness of the hostess, and finally stopped about 1988. This was much regretted and efforts were made to revive the group, but as the members lived so far apart, this has proved difficult.

Perhaps the fact that the average age of the congregation was moving up the scale caused the lack of heating in the church in winter to become a major issue. Investigation led to the feeling that electric heaters would be the most suitable but that this would require additional electrical wiring in the church.

St. Mary's became a film location with the filming of the television series "Meester". In 1989 the film company requested the use of the church for part of the filming which would be carried out in the Fourniesburg - Clarens area. The church scene for the film was made after removal of the gutters of the church and the erection of what looked like a gallows near the entrance to the church. This turned out to be a structure for hanging a church bell at a height which could easily be seen during the filming. The fencing around the church also had to be removed and replaced after the filming. With the advent of new gutters a move was started to have the church properly renovated.

In 1990, in the week before Easter, the church and vestry were broken into. Vestments, candles and the silverware were among the items stolen. Fortunately the

inventory was up to date, the insurance company paid out the claim, and replacement of the stolen goods could take place. Mr. Ted Middleton, son of that same Edmund Middleton ordained in 1916 and who had spent many years in the ministry in Leribe, presented his father's chalice and paten to take the place of that which was stolen.

Repairs to the church now took place in earnest and a three-phase electrical system replaced the single phase so that electrical heaters could be used.

Hopes were high during this period that the Highveld Water Scheme would result in more Anglican members, both at St. Mary's and at All Saints', but the few that did come did not make up in number for those who had left the area. Nevertheless the parishioners of St. Mary's continue to make every effort to continue the worship in their little church in Fouriesburg.