

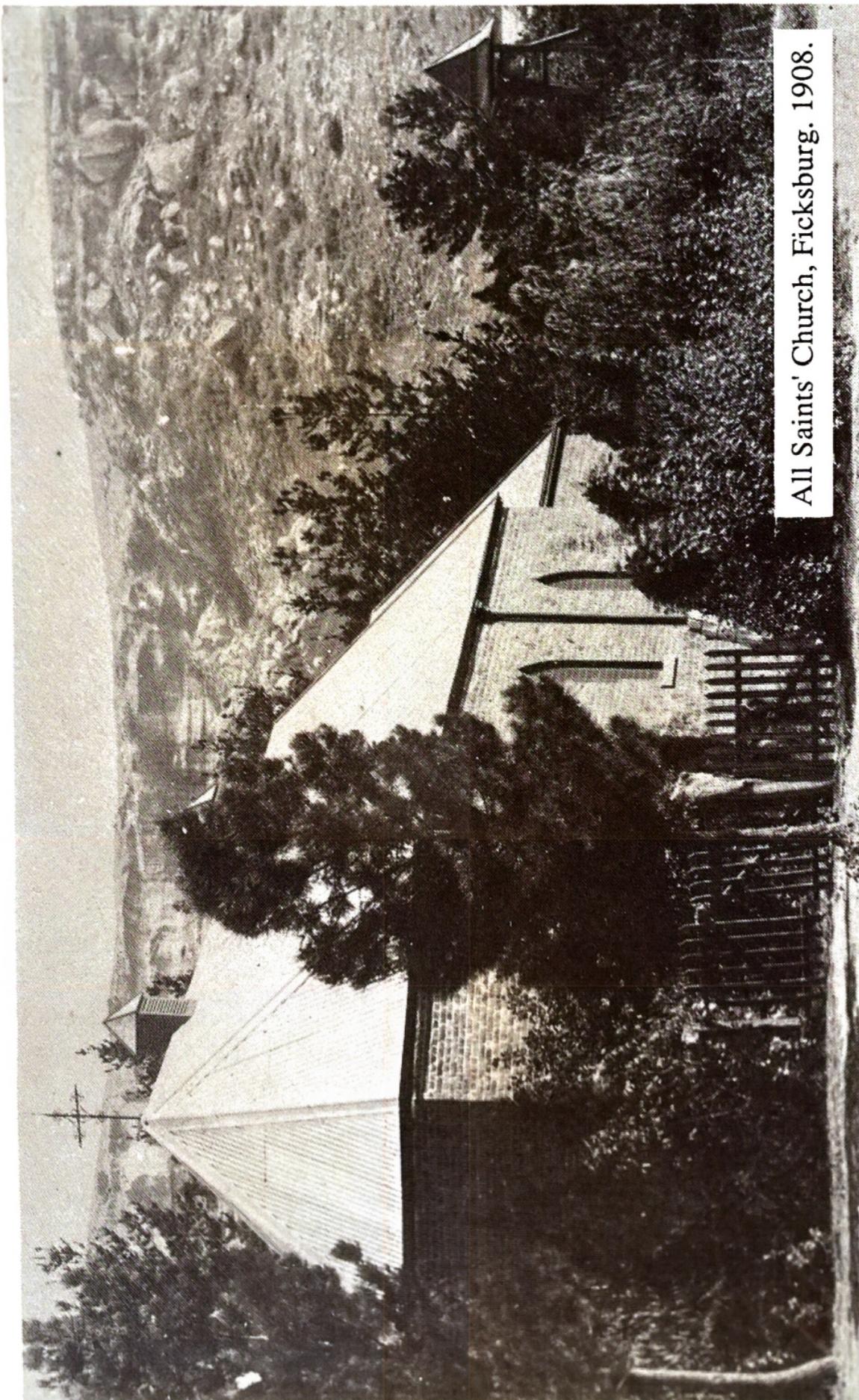
# **“AND ALL THE SAINTS”**

A history of the Anglican Church  
in the Parish of All Saints',  
Ficksburg, Fouriesburg,  
Clocolan and Marquard  
1871 to 1991

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

**ANDREW COLLEY**

To Wendy  
with love from Dad.  
Andrew Colley -



All Saints' Church, Ficksburg. 1908.

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## PREFACE

In the Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission of January 1903, Father Alfred Kelly SSM., wrote, "Up to a certain age man is acquisitive, and his real work is reading. When of an uncertain age, he turns generous, and his work is writing".

I suppose I must now have reached an uncertain-uncertain age, as this is really a compilation of other people's writing. It is based on extracts from letters, Parish Vestry and Council Minutes, newspaper articles, and other bits and pieces.

This book grew out of some articles on the history of the Anglican Church in the Eastern Free State which I wrote for our parish Newsletter. As 1991 and the centenary of the All Saints' Church in Ficksburg approached, it was suggested that the articles be added to and printed as a pamphlet. This then grew, through the enthusiasm of a Church Warden, Mr. Mike van Gelder, into plans for a book to be published during the centenary year, and then to include the centenary year, so that publication follows the next year.

Although it was the All Saints' Church which was 100 years old, it was decided to include something about the other Anglican churches which now go to make up the Parish of All Saints', namely, St. George's, Clocolan; St. Mary's, Fouriesburg; and others which are no longer used or have long been broken down.

As an example, the first church in the Clocolan district was opened by the Bishop on the farm "The Grove" on January 20, 1889. So the pamphlet has developed into a book about All Saints' Parish to the year 1991.

Most of the information for the book has come from the Church Minute Books and, for the early years, from the Quarterly Papers of the Bloemfontein Diocese. When reference is made to letters, these are usually from the Quarterly Papers. Details of the sources are given at the end of the book.

My thanks go to all those who have made this book not only possible but interesting for me. All the "Oldtimers" whose reminiscences fascinated me even when they could not form part of the book, those who made photographs available, including Mrs. Nancy Gardiner who gave us the photographs of the church windows which she had used in a magazine article, and all the parishioners who gave encouragement by seeming to be interested in their Rector's efforts at producing a history. Not least, thank you to Wendy

Treu and Anne van Gelder for checking the manuscript, and Michael van Gelder for the design and layout of the book.

With regard to history, though, the historians will no doubt find fault that the compiler/editor, call him what you will, has fallen into the old trap of giving the impression that the rest of the world did not exist when these events were taking place. I ask their forgiveness. Perhaps one of them will take all the books that have been written around Ficksburg in the same fashion and write a “complete history”.

It remains only for me to say, “the faults are mine, the glory belongs to God and the people of All Saints’ Parish, of the past and of the present, as we look to the future.”



## 1

## IN THE BEGINNING

**W**hat a marvellous history and tradition we Anglicans have. It is quite acceptable that the Anglican Church did not have its beginnings in Henry VIII, but long before that. Henry VIII saw only the beginning of the establishment of the Church in England as the Church Established in English law, and through parliament with the reigning monarch.

Of course the Christian Church has its origins in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and that must always govern everything we do. The Gospel is our foundation, but the conduct of the local churches in the way they have organized the running of their daily lives has varied from place to place, beginning with St. Paul and the Jerusalem Church. The Anglican Church really goes back to St. Columba, and has its roots in the Celtic Church, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, and on through Whitby, St. Anselm, Julian of Norwich, to the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement. All have played an important role in developing the form of conduct and worship which we know as "Anglican". Even today this is being influenced by changes taking place in our society and culture. The gospel remains the same, but the churches and their ethos must never become static or they will ossify or petrify.

As far as the beginnings of the Anglican Church in this part of the Eastern Free State, in the Republic of South Africa, is concerned, we need to look back to the Nineteenth Century.

Before about 1835 the country between the Orange and Vaal Rivers was hardly known to the 'white' settlers. Missionaries of the London Missionary Society entered the country about 1816, the Wesleyans about 1823. French missionaries passed through to Lesotho, or Basutoland as it was known for many years, in 1833. A few of the farmers living in the north of the Cape Colony visited the area in times of drought, as did a few hunters, but it was not really until the Great Trek started in 1836 that any number of "Europeans" were to be found in the area we now know as the Orange Free State.

The arrival of the Anglican Church as such can be associated with the coming of the British soldiers to the Orange River Colony, and Dr. Robert Gray, the First Bishop of Cape Town, who paid a visit to "the Sovereignty" in 1850. He had no sooner arrived

in Bloemfontein than he was entreated to place a resident clergyman there. So the Bishop and his host, Major Warden, went about choosing sites for a church, burial ground, parsonage, and school. On the Sunday the Bishop celebrated Holy Communion; married a couple, baptised, confirmed, consecrated the military burial-ground; conducted services for the troops in an open shed; and took another service with sermon in the school-house. So the work of the Anglican Church started in the Orange Free State. However, although Archdeacon Merriman visited the area twice and clergy were placed in Bloemfontein for short periods, it was not until the consecration of Bishop Twells in 1863 and the foundation of the new Diocese, that anything of real consequence was done.

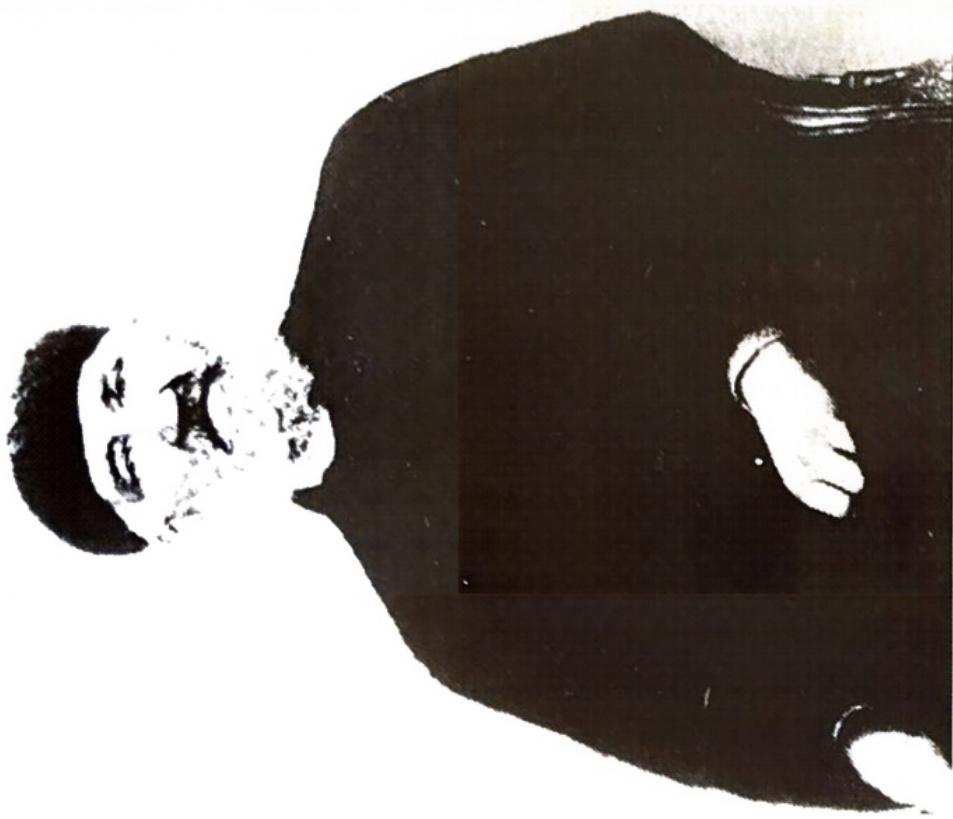
The first Bishop of Bloemfontein, Bishop Edward Twells, arrived in the Diocese on 16 September 1863. By this time, besides Bloemfontein, Winberg, Smithfield and Philippolis; Fauresmith and Harrismith, and the villages of Boshof and Jacobsdal, as well as Kroonstad and Bethlehem, had been founded.

We know from historical records that Ladybrand and Ficksburg came into existence only with the declaration of the ‘Conquered Territories’ at the end of the 3rd Basotho War. The “Gouvernments Courant” of 27 June 1867 asked for tenders for the measurement of 400 erwe in each of the three dorps of Ladybrand, Ficksburg, and Wepener.

Before this, however, in November 1864, a Mr. George Mitchell arrived with the special purpose of commencing a mission at Thaba ‘Nchu. But here again we need to go back a bit in time for the events which led up to the choice of Thaba ‘Nchu.

Moroka was the chief of the Seleka clan of the Borolong tribe, when drought drove them, accompanied by James Archbell, the Wesleyan missionary, from the southern bank of the Vaal river to the area near a flat-topped hill known as Thaba ‘Nchu, the Black Mountain. When Bishop Gray made his 1850 Visitation north of the Orange River, he visited Moroka at Thaba ‘Nchu. Subsequently Moroka’s son Samuel attended Bishop Gray’s school in Cape Town, Zonnebloem, and then went on to St. Augustine’s College, Canterbury. Chief Moroka had asked that Anglican missionaries be sent to Thaba ‘Nchu, not because he was a Christian but because it was thought to be good politics in those troubled times. Bishop Twells duly sent Mr. Mitchell, who had been a fellow student of Samuel’s at St. Augustine’s College, and he and Samuel arrived together.

Bishop Twells had been dismayed at how much work lay before him in developing his new Diocese. In addition to this he found that clergy were unwilling to come out from England. At the beginning of 1866 he therefore decided to attempt a new



The Reverend Canon Henry Beckett  
First Superior of Modderpoort



Bishop Twellis

form of mission work in the form of a missionary Brotherhood, the members of which should live by a common rule, be content with food and clothing, and should be willing to work with their hands.

So it was that the Reverend Canon Henry Frederick Beckett, a Canon of the Collegiate Church, Isle of Cumbrae, Scotland, answered the call to head the Brotherhood. Canon Beckett was an old friend of Bishop Twells and his family, and he at once proceeded to raise funds and gather a company. Before leaving on a visit to England in 1867, Bishop Twells made arrangements for the purchase of two farms known as Modderpoort and Modderpoort Spruijt. The farms in the area had been granted to the burgers who had fought in the Basuto Wars and the man to whom these had been granted, named Green, did not want to farm them and so they were bought for the sum of 352 pounds.

These two farms at Modderpoort were to be the centre for the work of the Missionary Brotherhood to be formed by the Bishop. The farms were purchased out of the funds raised by Canon Beckett for the establishment of the order, the Bishop being signatory on behalf of the order which had not yet been established.

Canon Beckett, together with Mr. William Crisp; Mr. J. E. Williams; a skilled mason, Mr. W. Terry; and two others, reached Port Elizabeth on July 12, 1867. Proceeding to Bloemfontein they found that war with the Basuto was in progress and it was therefore imprudent to go straight to the farms at Modderpoort. In point of fact it seems the commando which had been called up to clear the Conquered Territory of Basuto and avenge the murders which had taken place, actually had their base camp on the Modderpoort farms.

A farm named Springfield was hired for the use of the Brotherhood and the following May, Canon Beckett, now Canon of Bloemfontein Cathedral, moved with the Brethren to Thaba 'Nchu, where they built a church which was dedicated by the Bishop on December 30 1868. Basutoland having been annexed by the British Governor, Woodhouse, at Moshoeshoe's request, the brotherhood then moved on to occupy Modderpoort during Easter, 1869. As there was no accommodation for them at Modderpoort they set up "home" in a cave on the side of the Platteberg. Canon Beckett wrote in a letter in April 1869, "After unloading our wagon we turned our attention to the ordering of the cave, in which we have made our temporary home. By building up a wall of stones we have contrived to enlarge the area so as to get a room 12' x 14' for a chapel, besides a small sleeping room, screened off by a large stone. Both rooms we have much improved by digging away the floor so I can now stand upright in the Chapel, and sit upright in the bedroom." They lived in this cave for just over a year, until a house was built.

Services in Ladybrand commenced at a fairly early stage, while the first service was held in Wepener by the Rev. Bevan, a Priest Associate of the Brotherhood, on May 12, 1870. In March 1871, Canon Beckett left on a long proposed visit to Ficksburg, Sand River, and Bethlehem, accompanied by Mr. Dixon.

In Ficksburg, which by this date was still smaller than Ladybrand, they were the guests of Mr. Mitchell "at Imperani". On Saturday the Canon visited the people, finding that most of them spoke and understood English. Canon Beckett reported that six or more of the farmers were English. Four of them came in with their families on the Sunday, joining all the other inhabitants of the village at the service held by Canon Beckett.

On the Sunday afternoon a meeting was held and a subscription was made to build a school-chapel, the Canon promising to visit them again in two months.

On Saturday, June 3 1871, the Canon returned to Ficksburg, or Vicksburg as he spells it in his letter that refers to the visit. He describes the village as containing only ten houses at this visit. He was encouraged to find that the bricks and the windows for the new school-chapel, which had been decided upon during his previous visit, were already in hand. The services on the Sunday were in Mr. Aran's house, and were attended each time by 31 adults and about 10 children, "while some remained outside for want of room". There were several English speaking farmers in the neighbourhood who came in for services, and there were four young women who were anxiously looking forward to Confirmation. These young women, once they had been given some hope of an early Confirmation, took pains in preparing themselves. They were also "willing to go to Bloemfontein - three days' journey with horses, six days with oxen- when they were fully prepared". Two of them came eight miles for instruction at each of the Canon's visits.

In January 1872 the Diocese of Bloemfontein held the first Synod of the Diocese. At this assembly the future parochial organisation of the Diocese was discussed, and Canon Beckett advocated the establishment of a clergyman in the north east portion of the Diocese, whose ministrations would then include Ficksburg. However it would seem that this was not to happen for some years as there was still a great shortage of trained men in the Diocese, and even after someone was placed in the area, Canon Beckett and his small group at Modderpoort continued to minister to the Ficksburg area from time to time.

In his Diary, Canon Beckett recorded in 1873 that they had begun to hold services at Ficksburg on the first Sunday in each month.

When we try to establish where the first Anglican Church in Ficksburg was sited in those early days we find that the Diocesan records report that Erf No's 1 and

3 were transferred to the Diocesan Trustees on the 8 March, 1873, and Erf No 13 was transferred to the Diocesan Trustees on the 27 October 1874. Erf No. 13 is on the corner of Van Andel and Fontein Streets, and the belief is that the little building which is still standing on this erf, in Van Andel Street, was the original "St. Columba's". We have to query whether this was in fact the first little school chapel referred to by Canon Beckett, built in 1871. In 1884, the Rev. T.O. Meyer refers to the church he had been appointed to in 1882 in the following terms; "I found a little church, so called, it being a former dwelling house, of two rooms. The partition wall was taken out, a dias formed of mud, with rough stone facings; and thus it became the church of St. Columba."

Now this does not seem to be the same chapel for which the congregation had obtained bricks and windows in 1871, so perhaps the school chapel was a previous building, separate from St. Columba's. Erf No's 1 and 3 were in Van Andel Street between Veldt and Brand streets, just opposite where the road across the railway line now goes to the station.

In September 1874 a theological student named Mr. G. M. Russell was sent as schoolmaster to Koppie Alleen, near Ficksburg. He gave services fortnightly at Ficksburg for about a year before moving to Katjiesberg near Brandwater.

By 1876, the Reverend Widdicombe reported that Ficksburg contained "about thirty houses, mostly built of un-burnt brick, two or three good-sized stores, a neatly-built Dutch Reformed Church, and an unpretending, but internally well-arranged English Church". He also reported that the Wesleyans held a service once in two months, and the Dutch Reformed Church about three times a year, but that he believed that the latter were making efforts to obtain a resident preacher of their own. His hostess on this particular visit was Mrs. Macdonald, while he made arrangements with another member of the Anglican Church, a mason named Bain Harris, for the erection of a Mission Chapel and School in Leribe.

We should perhaps side-track slightly with some information about the mission at Thlotse Heights, Leribe, because Ficksburg was often served by clergy from the mission there. It was begun by the Reverend John Widdicombe in 1876 and he was helped by a Catechist and Schoolmaster, Mr. Lacy. In 1877 Mr. Widdicombe was joined by the Reverend F. Balfour, the church being opened by the Bishop in January of that year.

The mission station was called after the Thlotse, a little river running into the Caledon. These rivers formed a hazard when services had to be held on the far side, especially after heavy rains. At one time one of the clergy from Thlotse had to serve Ficksburg once a fortnight. If the river was high, he had to swim his horse over, and cross in a boat. In his book on the Diocese, William Crisp wrote that on the 9 December, 1877

"a grievous loss fell upon the young Mission of St. Saviour's, Thlotse Heights. Mr. W. Lacy... who had come into the Diocese while still a lad, and who had won the affection and regard of all who knew him, was drowned in the Caledon River." According to Canon Beckett's diary, he had accompanied the Bishop's wife and children back to St. Augustine's, Modderpoort, and was returning to Thlotse when the accident occurred.

As the Reverend Balfour had moved to Sekubu, the Reverend Widdicombe was left on his own and so had to suspend his work in Ficksburg, Advance Poort and along the Caledon, but the Reverend Balfour arranged to visit Ficksburg from Sekubu, alternating with Canon Beckett.

In April 1880, Bishop Webb went to Ficksburg to meet with Father James Douglas, who had taken over as Superior of Modderpoort from Canon Beckett. In the record of the Bishop's visit in the "Quarterly Papers" we read, ".....now it is proposed to place a clergyman in charge of the district, towards whose support the people guarantee 150 pounds per annum. After the afternoon service on Sunday, a meeting was held, at which it was determined to buy a house, which had recently been built, for the sum of 350 pounds. A strong wish was expressed by some of the church people who lived at a distance from the village that a boarding school might be established, to which they might send their children, and that the clergyman who might come to them might be able to undertake this. The Bishop, however, decided that the work of the district was more than sufficient for the fullest energies of a clergyman, and advised them to wait till a year's experience of the wants of the place should enable him to encourage another helper to undertake the school....."

Erf No. 67, in Ficksburg was transferred to the Diocesan Trustees on May 23, 1881. This was the entire property in De Jager Street behind the present church and rectory grounds. The house referred to was on that erf, in Piet Retief Street, and was retained as a rectory for many years.

At the beginning of 1880 the Cape Colonial Government, which then had oversight over Basutoland, proclaimed their "Disarmament Policy" in which the Basuto were required to hand in their guns. Although some did so, there were those who resisted the policy and the "Gun Wars" broke out. As Thlotse was attacked at this time, the Reverend R.K. Champernowne took charge at Ficksburg, "most of our refugees being there".

In January 1877 a theological student, Mr. T.A Meyer, set out from England to join the Bloemfontein Diocese. He had had some Colonial experience and spoke Dutch fluently, "so that he is likely to be a valuable addition to the staff of the Diocese." This was to be the first resident clergyman in Ficksburg. After spending a number of

years in training in Bloemfontein, including teaching at the school there, approval was given for his ordination, and it was decided to send him to Ficksburg.

Initially he was introduced to Ficksburg by the Reverend Father Douglas in July 1882, at which time the plan was that he should stay at Modderpoort and visit Ficksburg every fortnight, until after his ordination on September 24, 1882.

In the Diocesan News of the Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine of March 1883, we read of the happenings in Ficksburg as follows; "The Bazaar in the beginning of January was a great success. All praise is due to the ladies, who, by their untiring labour, brought together from far and near both articles and purchasers. About 85 pounds were consequently paid of the debt of 148 pounds incurred in repairing the Parsonage. The ladies further presented Mr. Meyer with a purse of twenty sovereigns when he left for Bloemfontein to fetch home his bride. Mr. and Mrs. Meyer arrived in Ficksburg on the 27th of January, and were very warmly received by the parishioners. St. John's school opened on the 30th of January, and the school-room is now so crowded that a new building is an absolute necessity. There are 30 children on the roll, - 19 boys and 11 girls. Miss Stanley has kindly undertaken to assist in teaching during the afternoons."

The school was started in one of the rooms of the parsonage which the Reverend Mr. Meyer described in his letter of January 1884;

"....Now a few words regarding the school. We call the school St. John's School, and it is a great feature in the work....I began the school work in one of the rooms of the parsonage with 12 pupils. On last St. Andrew's Day (Nov. 30, 1883) we opened a new schoolroom with 27 pupils. This new school I built with private money, and it has cost about 450 pounds....The school has a very large piece of ground for a playground attached to it. At present it is all private property, but I hope that the Church will be able to purchase it in years to come, at the cost of the outlay...."

In 1885 the Vicar General (there was no Bishop at the time), Father Davis G. Croghan, expressed the appreciation of the English farmers of the district who had families, for the advantages of the opportunity Mr. Meyer's ability and experience in this line gave their children.

In a letter dated July 7, 1885, the Reverend Meyer tells of his journey to Bloemfontein during the school holidays, and the letter gives an interesting picture of life and travel at that time. The Reverend Stenson from Wepener promised to take the services while he was away, so he set out with Mr. S. in his 'spider', "the distance to Bloemfontein being about 100 miles, over a good road". After stopping over that night at Ladybrand, in the clergyhouse close to the church, and owned by the St. Augustine's

Brotherhood, they left about midday "and went slowly up the Platberg, from the top of which we had a lovely view of the Malutis..."

He continues in his letter, "Friday night we put up at a little wayside shop, where we were well taken care of. Saturday morning at seven o'clock we started again; it was bitterly cold, but the sun soon warmed us. About sunset we arrived at a wayside shop, where one generally finds a bed, a stable, and forage for the horses. These little innkeepers trade with the Boers and the Kafirs, and accommodate travellers. But alas ! the place was locked. Looking round, we found the door of a little bedroom open, and the stable without a door. We had some food with us, and the only difficulty was to procure forage for our horses. I can speak Dutch, so I went to the neighbouring Dutch farmer and introduced myself as the English Predicant from Ficksburg. They invited us to supper, and provided for the horses.

There was a good piano, and we spent a very pleasant evening, talking Dutch. The conversation was chiefly with their schoolmaster, who informed us that he was engaged to prepare the grownup son and daughter for "Annehmen", Confirmation.... The next day was Sunday, and we arrived at Bloemfontein just in time for the eleven o'clock service at the Cathedral."

After the Reverend Meyer left Ficksburg (about the end of 1886) the school seems to have passed out of the hands of the Church, until some time in 1890.