

NOTES ON BRUNY ISLAND CHURCH HISTORY

(First compiled by Norma Campbell and revised by Kathy Duncombe in 2022).

1841- Hobart Town Advertiser 19th February 1841 stated: Bruni has over 20 families, about 200 people. No Post Office communication – a constable brings letters when he goes to the mainland infrequently, not for weeks. According to Mr Robert Warren Gibbs the people of Bruny Island were without spiritual instruction as late as 1843. On 13 December, Mr Gibbs wrote to Bishop Nixon on the subject, enclosing a list of signatures of residents willing to accept Mr Gibbs as their pastor. Among those signing was Capt. William Lawrence, Pilot, who later built St Peters Church at Variety Bay.

Also included was a list of adults, free and bond, and children, with the religious denominations of each: **C of E 125, Scottish 4, Catholic 18.**

Mr Gibbs offered to perform divine service at his residence, *Fairy Land*, centrally situated at The Neck and only 18 miles from the ferry, 20 from the lighthouse, and with a room large enough to hold a congregation^[1]. He had a house and a horse he was prepared to use but he requested a regulation salary.

The bishop sent the petition to the Governor who informed Mr Gibbs on 13 January 1844 that an appointment could not be made as no provision had been made in the annual estimates since 1838. Mr Gibbs was appointed religious instructor at the Launceston Penitentiary on 24 August 1844 and licensed to perform religious duties. Mrs Gibbs apparently remained at *Fairy Land*.

Captain William Lawrence had a grant of land at Variety Bay and lived there until the 1850s. In 1846, at Variety Bay, he built St Peters Church which was consecrated by Bishop Nixon on 20 August 1850. The church was surrounded by thick bush with a road leading to it from Capt. Lawrence's home overlooking Storm Bay. The church was burnt down in 1892.

Captain Lawrence moved to Barnes Bay in the 1850s and lived in *Kirkby Lodge*, in Simmonds Bay, Barnes Bay. He died there on 25 June 1884, aged 82 and is buried in a family vault close to the bay.

Another church, **St Johns**, was built at the eastern end of Barnes Bay in the 1850s. Capt. Butler Stone, an officer in the 99th Regiment, who came to Hobart in 1843, wrote in his publication *A Year in Tasmania* (1864):

There are two churches in North Bruny, one at Variety Bay, built and endowed with ten acres of land by William Lawrence, the pilot; the other at Barnes Bay, built by subscriptions and a grant from **The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts**, the site being given by Richard Pybus and his wife on 23rd August 1845.

There seems to be no record of this church at the Diocesan Office, Hobart, though a conveyance of a gift of land is held there. Some local residents, including Oliver Gray, remember the church but only the outline of the foundation remains on *Briar Lodge*, not far from *Kirkby*. The church was referred to as St Johns on marriage records. The Bruny Island Historical Society built a cairn on the site to record its location. The old church was used as a school for some time, then as a camp and was burnt down in the early 1920's

The Church continued to be used and the January 1896 "Church News" tells of its successor.

A committee was formed, Mrs Davis of Trumpeter Bay as Treasurer and Mrs Denne of Barnes Bay as Secretary. William Spong offered two acres of land overlooking Barnes Bay for a small sum.

The committee began to raise funds. Gray Bros. of South Bruni have all the timber and Gilham Bros. of Hobart were the builders. The foundation stone was laid on 18th December 1895 by Bishop Montgomery. The steamer *Huon* was chartered to convey clergy and visitors from Hobart. The party was welcomed by the Incumbent Rev. R J de Coetlogon, who escorted them to the home of Mrs Lindsay (“Lyndenne”) where a procession formed to march to the site of the new church.[\[2\]](#)

Mr Fagg, the architect of St Clements Kingston, gave plans, approved by the bishop and accepted by North Bruni. Seating was for 86 people. The cost estimated at £80 – less voluntary labour. It was consecrated on 4 September 1905 by Bishop Mercer. The seating was made by Mr A H Denne and his brother, free of charge. A small piece of tapestry worked by Mrs Lawrence was given by Mr Denne.

This is for the first church built on the site of where St Peters stands today [2022] after the first Church of St Peters at Variety Bay was burned down.

This too was burnt down in the 1967 bush fires and the third St Peters Church was erected in 1968.

First compiled by Norma Campbell

Updated in 2005 by Kathy Duncombe

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[\[1\]](#) AOT NS 179/1/8, W/C B2270 V105 Gibbs did the census for 1841 and lists Church of England 101, Church of Scotland 16, Wesleyan Methodist 0, Other Protestant Dissenters 0, Roman Catholic 18 and jews 0, Mahomedans and Pagans 0.

AOT CS08/108/2270

[\[2\]](#) Church News March 1896