

HISTORY OF ST. STEPHENS ANGLICAN CHURCH PENGUIN

Edward Beecraft was the first person to purchase land in Penguin when in 1861 he purchased an area of 167 acres (lot 3688).

In 1861 he sold this land to Alexander Clerke who arrived in Tasmania from Ireland in 1830 at the age of 26.

Alexander never lived in Penguin, but his son Thomas built Coroneagh House, managed Coroneagh Estate and spent his life here.

The first Anglican Church services at Penguin were held in a storage shed near the wharf, until 1874 when the decision to build a Church was made.

The original St. Stephens Anglican Church measured only 25 x 15 feet (7.5 x 4.5 metres), and was built at a total cost of 85 pounds (\$170) on land bordering the Penguin Creek donated by Alexander Clerke.

It was opened for Divine Service on 7th. May 1874 when morning prayer was said by the Rev. Broome, and the sermon preached by the Rev. E.P. Adams of Deloraine.

The Church was so constructed that it would form a deep chancel for a larger Church if ever required.

Written Church records for the period 1882 – 1892 are very brief, and consist mainly of Parish meetings which were held annually and were for the purpose of appointing Church Wardens. These meetings were conducted by the Rev. E. Champion the rector of the Parish of Forth from 1882 – 1887 and the Rev. Humphrey Davis from 1889 – 1892. Presumably these two gentlemen travelled on horseback to conduct these meetings and to hold the Church services.

Alexander Clerke died in 1887 and was buried in the Church grounds, his head stone and grave are still situated there.

By 1895 it was decided that the Church was no longer large enough to accommodate the rapidly increasing congregation.

The original structure was cut into two portions, the larger of which became the chancel of the new building, while the remainder became part of a commodious vestry.

The foundation stone for the new enlarged Church was laid on Tuesday 22nd October 1895 in the presence of a large assembly, by the Rev. Canon Beresford, incumbent, assisted by the Rev. W. Earle.

A report taken from the North West Post 24 October states, “the incumbent placed a bottle containing copies of various publications in the cavity below the stone, which was at once lowered and solemnly dedicated in the usual manner”.

(The report of the laying of the foundation stone in the Church news of November 1 1895 makes no mention of this “time capsule”)

Canon Beresford then addressed those present. He regretted the absence of Mrs. Thomas Clerke who had promised to lay the stone, but owing to the delay by boisterous weather, she had been unable to remain at Penguin. Her presence would have perpetuated the name and interests of the Clerke family in the Penguin Church.

It was her father in law who had donated the land, and her husband Thomas who had taken up the family interest. For many years he not only helped with his money, but acted as a lay reader, an office he held until his death.

Mr. W.H.D. Archer from Brickendon in Longford, who had married Alexander Clerke's daughter Alphra Gertrude, donated the Church Bell which arrived from England on the Brier Holme.

The new and current Church was opened by Canon Beresford on 19th January 1896.