

CHRIST CHURCH ANGLICAN CHURCH, BEECHWORTH

A church presence started in the early 1850's and the present church building in Beechworth was erected in 1859 when there were about 25,000 people in the district, mostly engaged in gold mining. We know from early records that 55 of the 76 fathers of baptised children up to the end of 1856 were engaged in gold mining.

The first Rector was The Reverend Cooper Searle and a rectory was built for him in 1855. At the time the present church hall was the first church building. The second rector does not seem to have had a very good experience of the church in Beechworth as he is recorded as having remarked on "*the chilling indifference that has pretty generally prevailed among the members of our church.*" In fact had it not been for the generosity of the Victorian Government at the time who provided two-thirds of the building costs of the church, it would never have been built. At the time the annual salary or stipend of the Rector was £350 but at the Annual General Meeting in early 1859 only £176 had been raised; the parishioners complained that this was the fault of the clergy who did not do enough visiting. This was a theme that was to be repeated over the coming years many times.

The third rector, W R L Bennet, arrived in 1860 and promptly wrote to his bishop complaining that Beechworth was "*the most unattractive parish in the colony*". He lasted three years.

The fourth rector, W Corbet Howard, arrived in 1863 but matters were no better for him: there was a vote of no confidence in him in January 1865 at the Annual General meeting - fortunately it failed to be passed. One of the complaints about the Rector was that he did not do enough visiting of parishioners and spent too much time in the school with the children!

From the early 1860's the parish priest had also acted as chaplain to Beechworth gaol and this helped top up the stipend due to him. Soon he also became chaplain to the Mental Hospital. In 1868 this was firmly established and so the parish only had to find £250 of the £350 due to the Rector. It appears that his horse allowance was also no longer paid however.

The numbers of people appearing in the congregation never seemed to be very great and, as far as we know, from 1870 until the turn of the century, there would usually be between 10 and 20 at each service.

After Corbet Howard there were three more Rectors before the arrival of Archdeacon R H Potter. Numbers at services rose to between 30 and 40 and the tone of them reflected the new Anglo Catholic movement that had started in England some few decades before. He stayed over 20 years and was greatly loved. He died in May 1931 and was buried in Beechworth. During his time the diocese of Wangaratta had been established as separate from the Diocese of Melbourne and it is said that there was serious

consideration about basing the new diocese in Beechworth with the bishop living here.

Since Archdeacon Potter's time there have been a dozen or more rectors following him. With the closure of both the gaol and the Mental Hospital finances have again become a huge challenge to the parish. The churches of St Paul's Milawa and St Jude's Eldorado are now part of the combined parish of Beechworth and part time Rectors at Beechworth could only ensure services take place with the assistance of retired priests and lay workers.

The Sunday eucharist takes place every week at 10am at Christ Church Beechworth with services on most days during the week as advertised in the church porch. The current rectory at 27 Ford Street, next door to the church, was built in 1926.