

## South Darebin Anglican Parish

*Copy of the Secretary's letter addressed to the  
Bishop of Melbourne.*

*Northcote, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1857.  
Church at Northcote.*

*My Lord Bishop*

*I beg very respectfully to apprise  
your Lordship that at a parochial Committee  
meeting held this week at the above Township  
it was  
resolved. — That in accordance with a Resolution  
unanimously carried at a public meeting  
held on Friday evening last the 5<sup>th</sup> instant  
"Your Lordship be solicited to renew the  
application to Government for one of the  
acre Reserve Sections of Land at Northcote  
for the purpose of erecting a Church  
thereon."*

## All Saints Anglican Church

165 years in the Northcote community

May 2025



## ***All Saints and the early days of Northcote***

In 1857 a parochial committee held a series of 14 meetings in the Peacock Hotel in High Street at the top of what is now called Rucker's Hill. They worked to plan the acquisition of land and the raising of funds and all the other tasks necessary to build a Church of England in Northcote. From this committee the names of Mr Bastings, Mr Mitchell and Captain the Hon. Andrew Clarke, MLA, are familiar to anyone who walks the streets of Northcote.

They had the assistance of the Rev'd Charles Bardin, Vicar of the newly established Christ Church Brunswick, who from 1855 was in charge of the parish of Jika Jika, which extended from the Yarra River at Fairfield, taking in Northcote, to the 'Saltwater' (now Maribyrnong) River. The Rev'd Bardin had begun providing weekly evening services in a public building and the committee sought his support for the building of a church in Northcote.

Land was being offered by private land owners, and the committee of ten gentlemen worked to raise funds for a purchase, but in the end the necessary land was granted free of charge by the Government – half an acre at the corner of High and Walker Streets and half an acre at the corner of Cunningham and Ross Streets for a vicarage.

After great delays and difficulties the foundation stone was laid in January 1859 by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly. The committee met in early January to arrange celebrations for the event, and at this meeting Mr Bastings proposed that the church be named 'All Saints'. The church was built, costing in all £2,600. It consisted of part of what is now the main body, without the chancel and vestries, which were added later. The first service was conducted by Bishop Perry in the completed western half of the nave on 26 August 1860. In 1863 a vestry built of wood was added. During the next 15 years the nave was extended to its present size and the porch added. In the same period a schoolroom was built and a vicarage in nearby Cunningham Street. By 1865 All Saints Northcote was a parish in its own right, extending to Epping, and including Fairfield and parts of Clifton Hill.

### ***Acknowledgment of Country***

Before the arrival of white settlers the banks of the Merri Creek were home to Australia's First Peoples and their sacred practices. The Parish of South Darebin acknowledges that this church stands on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

It is difficult to visualise now how rural the area was when the church was built, or how very new the colony of Victoria was. It was only about 25 years since John Batman had come to agreement with Jika Jika and his brothers on the banks of the Merri Creek. Some historians think that event took place only a few hundred yards away from All Saints, near what is now Rushall station, or on the Rucker's Hill slope. The area of the city of Melbourne itself had only been surveyed in 1837, with James Hoddle laying out a North-South line as part of the planning grid for Melbourne, a line that would become the High Street. Construction of St James's church in William Street, later the Cathedral, had commenced less than 20 years before, on a site then known as 'Mr Batman's sheep pen'.

When services commenced the township of Northcote was what is now Westgarth, sparsely settled and with no transport connection to Melbourne. The Merri Creek was deep, stony, impossible to cross in winter, and there was no bridge until a timber one was built in 1857.

Land sales had begun in the 1840s. Large parcels of land had been bought up by speculators such as William Rucker and Michael Pender, some of whom became insolvent later and had to sell. With the influx of people and activity because of the gold rush and with land offered for sale by the big landholders, there was an extraordinary expansion in building and selling, including the building of some of the grander houses on the hill.

The Colony of Victoria had formally existed as a separate colony for only ten years (hence 'Separation Street', named in celebration of the separation of the colony from New South Wales). It was only seven years since the first house had been built in Westgarth.

There was no gas street lighting in High Street. It would be 15 years before the permanent bridge was built across the Merri, to bring the gas across to the Northcote side of the creek (the church was lit with gas in 1875). It would be 20 years before the coming of a cable tram because the gradient of Rucker's Hill had to be completely rebuilt before a tram line could be made to work.

It was 23 years before a railway was built from Clifton Hill to Fairfield. This was called at the time the 'Nowhere to Nowhere railway' because it was not yet connected to anywhere else.

It was 25 years before the site was even cleared for the great project of St Paul's Cathedral, a building venture that took decades, and where the foundation stone was not laid until in 1889. It was 28 years before the Town Hall and Post Office were built, and 30 years before Northcote was proclaimed a town. When Northcote came into being, All Saints had been here for a generation.



*All Saints in about 1885, showing gas street lighting and the elms of High street only recently planted*



## ***An important part of Northcote's heritage***

All Saints is now Northcote's oldest intact church, built in the style of English churches of the thirteenth century using Bacchus March basalt quarried for the purpose. It is built on a subdivision of land that was part of a police reserve in Robert Hoddle's plan for a township in 1853. Half of the land was granted for the church and a police station and lockup were built on the other. The police building, for thirty years Northcote's police station, is still behind All Saints at 24 Walker Street, the oldest Government building in the municipality.

The church building (excluding the vestries and chancel) is classified by the National Trust as of 'local' significance, meaning that it has cultural and historical significance in the context of the region. It is one of only two churches in Northcote to be classified and the only Anglican one. Citation:

'The first part of 1859-60 to the design of Nathaniel Billing, although this was never completed...the church is in the Early English Gothic style and distinguished by the use of Bacchus Marsh freestone dressings on a body of squared snecked bluestone rubble.'

Nathaniel Billing was a notable church architect of the day who designed many Victorian churches, including All Saints East St Kilda. He called for tenders for the first stage of construction at Northcote in November 1858 and is listed as having attended the opening.

Tenders were called for outbuildings in 1864 and further additions in 1873. Renovations took place again in 1885, with new cedar pews to replace old ones and the addition of a new gabled porch at the west end. A vestry was added at the east end in 1896, along with a new Sunday School building, which replaced an earlier schoolroom built by parishioner working bee.



The original vicarage was at 56 Cunningham Street, built in 1869. It was later sold to a committee headed by Pastor Doug Nicholls for the establishment of a hostel for Aboriginal girls, the first such hostel in Victoria.

The All Saints pipe organ was installed in 1883, the work of the nineteenth century organ builder William Anderson. The organ was worked on by George Fincham at a later date. It is classified by the National Trust with a 'regional' classification:

'The pipe organ at All Saints Anglican Church Northcote is significant for the following reasons: it retains its original mechanisms and wind system; it retains all of its original pipe work; it is a very early and rare example of indigenous organ building; it is the earliest documented organ built by William Anderson; it was originally sited at the Prahran Town Hall.'

## ***Parish life and ministry***

As well as a church, All Saints was a day school and Sunday School, under the one headteacher. A separate schoolroom was opened south of the church in 1861 and the school continued there until 1874. It was common for parish churches to provide Grammar Schools until the advent of publicly funded education in the 1870s. By 1895, 289 children were attending the Sunday School, with an average weekly attendance of 140, requiring 18 teachers. The church was tightly woven into the social fabric of people's lives – their childhood, adolescence, courting and marriage. By 1910 All Saints had 450 scholars attending its two schools. It had its own tennis and cricket clubs; it had social, scripture study and other groups meeting nearly every night of the week.

But it would be a mistake to think that it was ever easy for the church to maintain itself and its ministry, or that it was ever wealthy. From the beginning there was struggle to raise funds, to begin and sustain the school, to clear debt and pay for ministry. During the two major depressions in the 1890s and the 1930s the general hardship and poverty were reflected in a lack of church funds but even in better times, in the midst of significant wealth, there was always much real poverty.

A succession of vicars worried about the fact that children came to the Sunday School but never came to church and when they grew old enough to give up the Sunday School were lost to the church. They worried about empty pews too, as early as 1900, and the effects on families of drink and gambling.

It is also a mistake to think that buildings of the past were built to last and easy to maintain. Generations of churchwardens have worried about everything from the inadequate drains to the slate roof, which has undergone major works several times over. At one stage the external buttresses were declared unsafe by the Department of Health, and had to be re-mortared at great cost.



*All Saints 75 years ago, in 1949, showing timber chancel, choir and pulpit. The pipe organ was moved in the 1960s to its current place in the gallery.*

There were setbacks. In 1910, two weeks after the visit of the then Bishop of Melbourne to celebrate the 50-year anniversary, the wooden chancel burned down and everything in it, including the communion table and all furnishings, was lost. With typical stoicism the Vicar noted that 'the officers of the fire brigade very kindly lent a tarpaulin' and services went ahead. Later the timber additions were demolished (uncovering a much earlier foundation stone in the process) and replaced by the current bluestone extension and brick vestries, with great financial difficulty. The commemorative stone for this building project was laid by Bishop Baker in February 1965.

Over the decades the church reflected changes in the wider society. Australia's isolation from Europe did not protect it from the conflagration of the First World War, the physical suffering it brought, and the loss of faith that followed for many. The Great Depression and Second World War years were difficult for most people, and the church had few resources. During the war years All Saints families were each asked to each send an ounce of butter to Sunday School on the day before the annual picnic, so that the teachers could make the sandwiches. A sad reminder of harder times lies in the Annual Reports that refer to the deaths of Sunday scholars through infectious diseases that are now preventable.

Later, inner urban churches struggled with the rising tide of secularism and an influx of immigrants with little connection to British religious tradition. One Vicar said 'The depression passed but the parish never fully recovered from it. By the Second World War this was an inner suburban and industrial parish... great blocks of flats are rising...and further schemes envisage an increase of some two thousand in population.' And not many of them would be Anglicans.

For much of its history All Saints has stood in the tradition of low church evangelism, strongly associated with overseas and inland missions. It grew several notable missionaries to India and what is now Tanzania, and for decades sent money and other forms of support to missionaries with whom there was a personal relationship. One Vicar argued that you should judge the health of a church not by how many people attended but by how much it gave to missions, playing its part in bringing the Gospel to 'the uttermost parts of the world'.

In 1986 history of another kind was made at All Saints. The Rev'd Marjorie McGregor was placed in charge, the first woman ordained Deacon in Australia, and the first woman to be placed in charge of any parish in Australia.

By this time, many parishes had become unviable and the Diocese was working with local communities on ways of rationalising. On 1 February 1987 the Rev'd John Stockdale was sadly farewelled from the neighbouring church of Holy Trinity Thornbury. This community formed a joint parish with All Saints, and after the last independent service for Holy Trinity in November 1989, the community joined All Saints permanently, bringing with them a small amount of money, some precious objects and furnishings, and a great fund of spiritual wisdom and experience. In a sense they were coming home, as Holy Trinity had been established with the support of the mother church All Saints.

At the same time, in a further consolidation of parishes, All Saints became part of the parish of St Paul's Fairfield with All Saints Northcote, with the Rev'd Stuart Gardiner as Vicar. In 2001 a further parish restructure took place. The amalgamated Fairfield-Northcote parish joined with St James, Thornbury as the new parish of South Darebin, a structure that

has allowed for local identity and sense of place to be preserved, while consolidating our resources. This parish was restructured again in 2022, with St Paul's Fairfield beginning a new life as part of Merri Creek Anglican.

Through the 1980s and 1990s the large All Saints Hall at the rear of the block had been used by the Medical Mission Auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society for warehousing of medical supplies for overseas missions. In 2002, as part of a plan for better financial stability, it was agreed that the Brotherhood of St Laurence should establish a shop in this hall. The shop has become an important link between the church and the people of this community, and an ever-present reminder of the Anglican Church's role as a major agency of practical social action. It continues to be operated by the parish.

### ***All Saints today***

The church is redefined in each generation, but it's good to reflect that we stand in the footsteps of all the faithful who went before us and to acknowledge the sacrifices they made. We have seen many churches closed, sold or demolished. We are grateful that this beautiful place is here as a living sign of God's love. We look back with thankfulness, to honour those whose vision and hard work built this church, those whose faith and loyalty sustained it, those who have ministered here, and all who have broken bread together here in the name of Christ. We are proud to carry on this tradition and look forward with confidence.

The community of All Saints today is a mixture of people with different strands of Anglican sensibility, 'low' and 'high'. We have kept the best of the past – the beauty of traditional music and reverent worship, a sense of holy mystery, the faithful observance of the yearly round of festivals and seasons, shared meals and generous giving. But we also strive to keep the best of the present and to live the faith of modern people – appreciating difference, open to change, well disposed to people of other faiths and able to see our own lives as a work in progress. We work to make All Saints a place of permanent welcome to all.

To all who visit this place and share our life, we say  
Welcome!

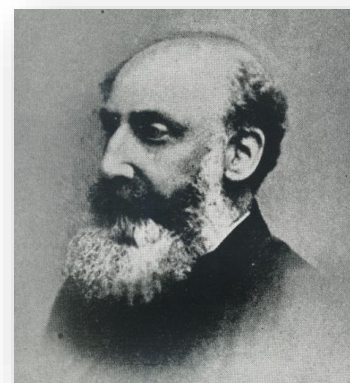


More information about All Saints Northcote and the Anglican Parish of South Darebin can be found on the parish website at <https://www.allsaintsnorthcote.org.au/>



## ***Vicars of All Saints***

1860–1864 C.P. Bardin, Vicar of Christ Church Brunswick  
1865–1867 W. Hall  
1867–1869 J. Carlisle  
1870–1873 C. Booth  
1873–1885 D.M. Berry  
1888–1899 C.P. Thomas  
1899–1900 W.C. Ford  
1901–1930 A.C. Kellaway  
1930–1943 A.H. Constable  
1943–1945 E.D.J. Shaxted  
1945–1956 R.H. Pethybridge  
1956–1964 C.D. Maling  
1964–1976 H.R.L. Bailey  
1976–1980 D. Paproth  
1980–1983 W. Johnstone  
1983–1986 D. Williams  
1986–1987 M. McGregor  
1987–1989 M. McGregor and P. Mather  
1989–2005 S. Gardiner  
2005–2019 A. Oddy  
2023–2023 J. Jackson  
2024– L. Fiske



*Founding Vicar, C.P. Bardin*



*The Rev'd Dr Linda Fiske*

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*We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Mr Gary Edge, Darebin Libraries, in digitising our historical photographs*

### **Sources**

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