

# University of New England Chapel, Armidale

Florence May Wilson, a member of the White family, gifted a parcel of land to the Diocese as the site for an Anglican Chapel at the University of New England. The land was part of the *Trevenna* estate which she bequeathed to the University and has since been used as the Vice Chancellor's residence. The gifted land is where the Chapel now stands. The first Chaplain was the Rev John Rymer, who was also Chaplain to New England Girls' School. Ministry included an evening service, held in a Rural Science lecture theatre, as well as personal counselling.

Bishop Moyes was opposed to students' church affiliation being other than with the Cathedral. While Bishop Moyes was at the Lambeth Conference in 1959, an unused weatherboard church was moved from Tilbuster so that services could be held on the land gifted to the Diocese. It took some time to obtain Bishop Moyes' approval for electricity to be connected to the building, and it is possible he never entered it.

Worship was more formal than is the case now, with clergy robes and lighted candles in regular use. A Rural Science room was still used for more casual meetings.

While the Rev John Rymer took leave to study for two years in England, Milton McGregor fulfilled the two chaplaincy roles. His style was more formal. Not long after the Rev Rymer returned, the University of New England Anglican Society was formed, on 27 September 1964. The inaugural committee had a staff representative, Mr Vern Williams, who was a member of the University Physiology Department and remains a member of the Chapel community. The Rev Rymer soon moved to a theological college in Dunedin, New Zealand, and later became Dean of the Cathedral in Auckland.

In 1965 the Rev Maurice Betteridge became Chaplain, while also serving as Chaplain at NEGS, until 1969 when he was appointed to a part-time position on the academic staff of the University's History Department. Morning services could now also be fitted into the Chaplain's program. A small number of families associated with the University became involved and saw themselves primarily as supporters of the student ministry.



The original building being moved to the university church land



The original church building

During this period the old building became increasingly inadequate, especially for evening services. Extra chairs were placed down the aisles; students sat on the floor up at the front of the church building and some stood on stools outside the windows. Some even thoughtfully chose not to come to church so that there would be room for others! The singing was vibrant in the crowded building, accompanied by Mr Richard Ward from Oakwood on a pump organ previously used in the church at Nullamanna in Inverell Parochial District. The Rev Betteridge's history background lent valued insight to his preaching. After services, supper gatherings were regularly held in *Rymbosa* or in people's homes, including those of John and Dorothy Wheeler, David and Margaret Mills, and Howard and Heather Doran. Singing, discussion and extra talks were a feature of these gatherings.

When some services and other activities had to be held in Madgwick Hall, in an attempt to ease the accommodation problem, the Diocese agreed to support the provision of a new building to cost approximately \$41,500 unfurnished. This was financed partly by the sale of the Ohio Boys' Home and land at Walcha, partly by the generosity of students, graduates and friends of the University, and partly by a bank loan that was paid off by the Chapel congregation by 1978. The old building was sold for \$1,000 and is still in Armidale, where it belongs to the Drummond Park Preschool Association in Carey Avenue.

The new St Mark's Chapel was officially dedicated on 4 July 1971 by Bishop Kerle. The space was divided by folding doors, providing room for less formal activities as well as for future growth in congregation numbers.

During the Rev Betteridge's ministry the Chapel developed a more ecumenical outlook, in line with the Diocesan view that the Chapel might act 'as an outreach of the Church to those associated with the University'. The Rev Betteridge went on to become Federal Secretary of CMS, and later Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne.



St Mark's, UNE complex

In 1973 the Anglican Society's inaugural treasurer, Tony Doran, returned as the University's first full-time Chaplain. Tony had just completed studies at Moore College and could build on the 10 years' experience he had had at UNE throughout the 1960s when gaining a Science degree and a PhD in Physics. His short stay was notable for public lectures on ethical issues, and the number of involved students who went on to become clergy. The Rev Tony Doran, as planned, went on to serve with CMS in North Sumatra for 10 years, until his early death.

The Rev Michael Hill served as Chaplain from late 1974 to mid-1975, being followed by the Rev Kevin Giles who remained in the position until 1980. During this period, the proportion of non-student members of the Chapel congregations began to increase. In due course, a Sunday School was established and this provided an opportunity to involve students, a practice which continues. The involvement of members of the Chapel in all aspects of its life increased significantly. Preaching and leading services, particularly the evening services, became a regular practice for members of the congregation, while students were presented with opportunities to develop qualities of leadership in an environment difficult to replicate in a more normal parish situation. The wider outreach to all students continued and was strengthened when the Anglican Society altered its name to St Mark's Christian Fellowship, so as to indicate the ecumenical nature of the Chapel community.

The area behind the folding doors proved unsuitable for Sunday School, being too noisy during church services, so children's classes were held in the office, the kitchen and even the store room until eventually permission was obtained to use rooms in the adjacent Economic Studies building.

During 1981 the Rev Greg Tobin acted as part-time Chaplain and encouraged the continuation of congregational involvement in the life of the Chapel. The Rev Hugh Begbie succeeded him, and during this period there was a further increase in the size of the morning congregation. The evening service had always been student-oriented and gradually became less traditional in its format. It was also at about this time that the practice of closing St Mark's over Christmas and much of January ended. Those still in town had attended St Peter's Cathedral. Another innovation at this time was the introduction of part-time assistants, usually student members of Chapel who had completed their studies. The Rev Begbie left following his appointment as Master of Cromwell College at the University of Queensland in Brisbane.

In 1990 the Rev Greg Burke became Chaplain and the morning congregation expanded considerably during his ministry, many of the new members having few or no formal links to the University. The strong relationship between the morning and evening congregations, however, became more difficult to sustain, although some mutual support has been maintained in areas such as hospitality, leading Bible studies, and Sunday School teaching.

The Rev Martin Trotman arrived in 1998 and the growth in the non-student congregation continued to the extent that an extra service was developed on Saturday evening, mainly for young workers who were not married. It developed into another family service to the extent that in 2006 this

congregation produced 13 babies. Martin also introduced a more formalised training program of ministry trainees who are now paid by a grant from the Diocese. The trainees support student members of the congregation. Following this experience a number of trainees have gone on to further theological study and service.

It is notable, too, that over the years St Mark's Chapel has also had a worldwide ministry, reaching and encouraging international students, and also sending out more than 20 overseas missionaries. A number of former 'Chapel' students have returned to the Diocese and become incumbents, including Cliff Ainsworth, Chris Brennan, Michael Dasey, Andrew Dircks, Tony Doran, Dave Fisher, Bernard Gabbott, Greg Harris, Ian Hazelton, John Jenner, Brian Kirk, Paul McFarlane, Keith Mascord, Gus Robinson, Andrew Taylor, James Vimpany, Tom Wallace, Simon Waller, David Wiedemann, Stephen Williams and Jeremy Wilson.

The growth of the congregations has led to the appointment of a second ordained minister, sometimes in conjunction with a part-time appointment from AFES (Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students). Appointments to date have been Gary Eastment, David Morgan, Stephen George and again Gary Eastment (2014).

A feature of recent years has been the very viable youth group, for which there are Bible classes on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings as well as a gathering on Friday nights. Many members attend Sunday evening services, especially as they draw closer to completing their schooling. The addition of the adjacent Ministry Centre in 2008 has provided much more satisfactory facilities for children's, youth and student activities. The Centre was a redundant University Publications building, of which much of the necessary refurbishment was achieved by congregational effort (and through help with the painting from St Peter's, South Tamworth). The \$42,000 cost of the work was raised through congregational donations and via a bequest.

The Rev Trotman resigned in 2011 and the Rev Darrell Parker became

Chaplain in 2012, his ministry continuing the evangelical tradition that has been such a strength of the community since its inception. The non-student congregation now has a wide age range, and a considerable variety of backgrounds. Current members are significantly involved in the local community and there is a challenge to relate more actively to our international students.



St Mark's Chapel, UNE