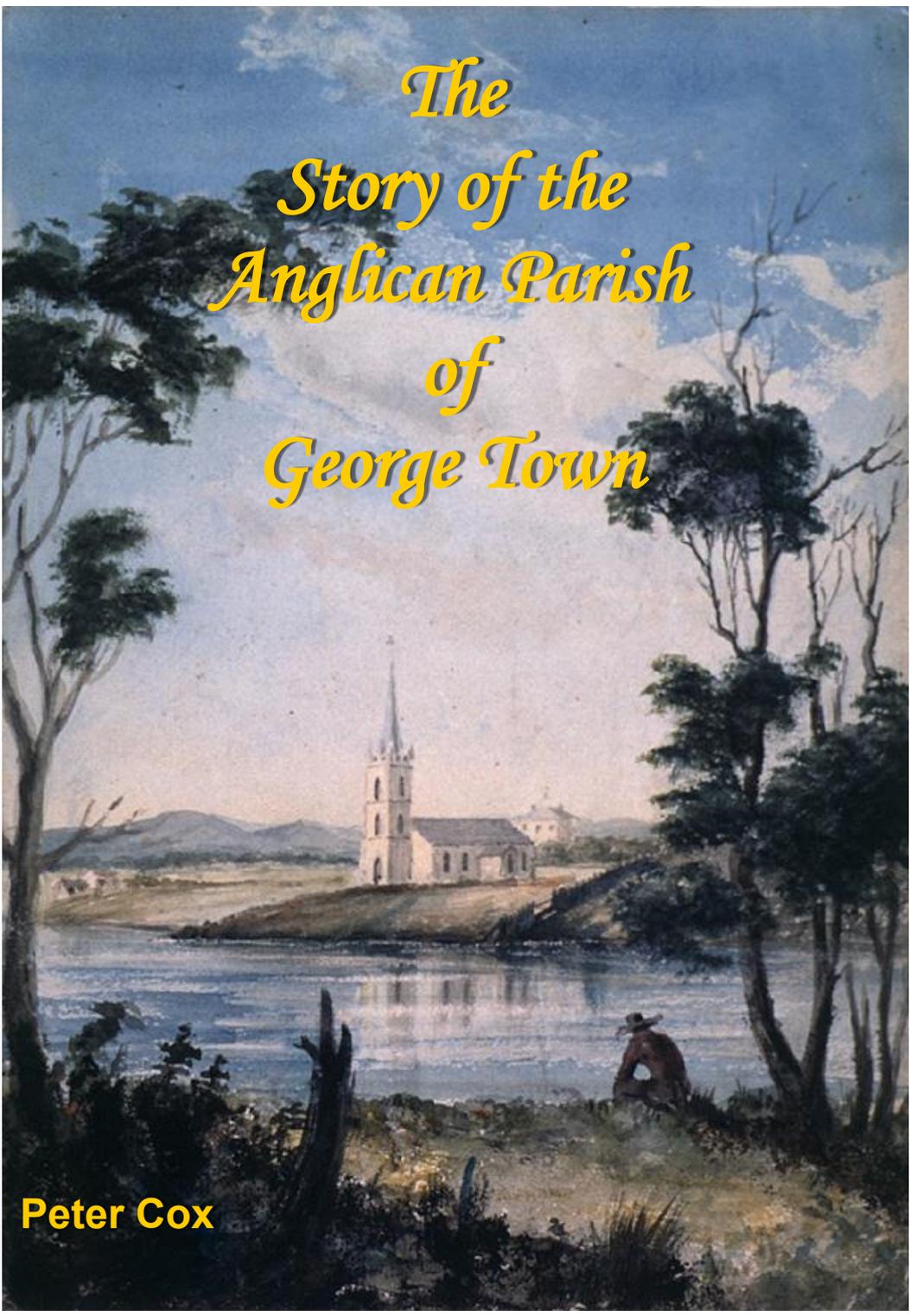


*The  
Story of the  
Anglican Parish  
of  
George Town*



**Peter Cox**



**The front cover is a painting by Susan Fereday of St Mary Magdalene Church as it would have appeared in the 1840's and early 1850's. This painting above is a later painting with the Spire removed, also by Susan Fereday.**

### **EARLY DAYS IN GEORGE TOWN**

The first European settlers to arrive in Northern Tasmania landed at Outer Cove, now York Cove, George Town, in early November 1804. They were lucky to get there, having battled storms on their way south from Sydney, and the main ship in the little fleet, H.M.S. *Buffalo*, having run aground as it made its way into the treacherous Tamar River estuary. It was with some relief that on the third day after its stranding, the *Buffalo* managed to be refloated, and was safely anchored in the cove.

The band of prisoners and their soldier guards unloaded their stores and pitched their tents around the cove. At 10 AM on Sunday 25th November the first church service in Northern Tasmania was held in front of the prefabricated house the Lieutenant Governor, Colonel William Paterson, had brought with him from Sydney. Edward Main, a former lay missionary to the South Seas Islands, and serving on the *Buffalo*, was seconded to take Divine Service and to remain with the infant settlement until instructions were received from Sydney on the matter.

Whether Edward continued to hold Sunday services, or even remained in the settlement after the *Buffalo* left is most unlikely. However, within a few months the convicts and their guards had been removed, the settlement moving first to York Town, and then in 1806 to Launceston. Outer Cove was used to graze cattle and soldiers continued to be kept at Low Head to keep a look out for ships and provide pilot services. But when the last of the cattle were moved to Launceston, Outer Cove was left to return to nature.

In December 1811 Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his wife, at the end of a tour of inspection of Van Diemens Land, landed at the cove. Concerned about Launceston's position some 65 kilometres from the sea, and frustrated by the winds and tides which had trapped his ship in the Tamar River, the Governor was searching for a better site for the headquarters of Northern Tasmania. He chose Outer Cove and renamed it York Cove. He called the proposed settlement George Town after the reigning King, George III, and drew up a plan of the streets for the new town. That night he and Mrs. Macquarie toasted the health of the new town, and slept in a tent on the site of the future Regent Square.

For the next eight years the Governor battled with the British Government, the reluctant settlers and officers of Launceston, (who were prepared to resign their positions rather than move away from their farms,) and a scarcity of convict laborers, to build the new town. Finally in 1819 the Commandant for Port Dalrymple, Major Gilbert Cimitiere, was ordered to take up residence, and George Town became the capital of Northern Tasmania.

### **THE FIRST CHAPLAIN**

John Youl, also a former lay missionary to the south seas and recently ordained as a Church of England priest, was appointed chaplain to the settlement of Northern Tasmania in March 1815. He arrived in Sydney in 1816, but Governor Macquarie kept him there, claiming the lack of suitable accommodation at George Town as the excuse for not sending him to his post. In late December 1818 John arrived in Hobart intending to visit his area. He traveled overland to

Launceston and George Town during the next few weeks, marrying 41 couples and baptizing 76 children. It was said that there was a shortage of wedding rings in the colony and Youl was forced to use anything that came his way. At George Town at least ten people were married using the same brass curtain ring.

Until John Youl's arrival the only chaplain in Van Diemens Land had been the Rev. Robert Knopwood, of Hobart, who in the 14 past years previous had made only two brief visits to the northern settlement. In the interim marriages had been registered by the magistrates. John finally arrived to take up his appointment in November 1819. He took up residence in the Government Cottage in Launceston, and was still there when Governor Macquarie made a second visit to Launceston in May 1821. The reluctant chaplain was ordered to remove himself to George Town, where a fine two story brick house had been awaiting him for more than a year. It stood in Cimitiere Street opposite Regent Square, and a combined chapel-school house was built on the corner of Cimitiere and Elizabeth Streets.

John Youl hated his time in George Town. He was far removed from the farm he had started on the banks of the South Esk River some 20 kilometres south of Launceston. There was only one free settler in the lower Tamar, and his congregation consisted solely of prisoners, former convicts and soldiers.

He became increasingly plagued by illness, and rarely visited Launceston, where the main body of free settlers remained. When he did, he would announce his arrival by walking through the streets of Launceston in his robes and beating an iron cask swung to a post outside the worship centre with a mallet, to summon the people to church. However, George Town's days as the capital of Northern Tasmania were numbered.

In 1820 a Commissioner, John Bigge, arrived in Van Diemens Land to investigate the administration of the colony. He carefully considered the relative advantages of George Town and Launceston, and ordered that the headquarters be removed up river to where the settlers had their farms. Even so, this recommendation took some years to happen, and it was not until the end of March 1825 that John Youl was able to take up residence in Launceston. There a new church, St. John's, was nearing completion, but Youl did not live to see it officially opened.

Illness and accusations of incompetence plagued his last years. The Commandant complained of his inability to undertake his duties, and the visiting Archdeacon agreed. It was suggested that he be removed to the relative ease of a country church, something which John stoutly resisted. He died in April 1827.

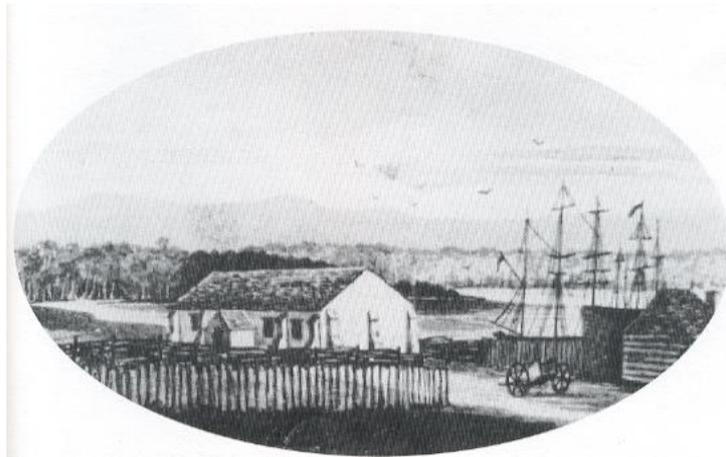
After John Youl's departure, George Town remained the responsibility of the chaplain for Port Dalrymple, based at St. John's, Launceston. The George Town parsonage was turned into a female prison, or 'factory', and the school house soon fell into disuse. As the officials and a large portion of the convicts were removed to Launceston, the school was closed, and John and his successor, Dr. Browne, rarely visited George Town. In the absence of a priest services in George Town were taken by the Storeman, William Kneale.

### **THE FIRST CHURCH BUILDING**

Other communities successfully petitioned and raised funds to build a church and support a minister, but this did not happen in George Town until the 1830s. The impetus came from Matthew Curling Friend, the Port Officer, who was transferred to George Town following a series of shipwrecks in the lower Tamar,

beginning with the wreck of the *Kains*, skippered by William Lushington Goodwin, in October 1831. Goodwin became very much a critic of port arrangements and it was because of the agitation following another wreck that Lieutenant Friend was located in George Town, where he built "The Grove" as his residence.

A new Act of the Legislative Council in 1837 to help communities establish their own churches provided the means of obtaining a church in George Town and Matthew Curling Friend's took advantage of it. A small brick church was built in Anne Street on the site of the present church.



**The first church on the Anne Street site, in its later years.**

In 1838, the ship *Honduras* was wrecked off Kelso, and William Goodwin, now editor of one of the Launceston newspapers, used the incident to attack Lieutenant Friend. A subsequent inquiry exonerated the Port Officer, who sued Goodwin and won damages of £400.

He used part of it to have a tower and spire erected at the cove end of the building. By 1841 a chaplain, the Rev. J. Walker, had been appointed. The church, however, was not consecrated until 1856.

Matthew Curling Friend continued to live in George Town until the 1850s, serving as church warden. By 1848 he had sold The Grove to the Rev. John Fereday. Soon after Friend's departure, William Goodwin himself came to live in George Town, renting The Grove from John Fereday, and serving for a time as a Church Warden. Ironically, it was decided that Lieutenant Friend's tower was structurally unsafe, and it was pulled down in the late 1850s. The spire had blown down in the late 1840s.

#### **JOHN FEREDAY**



The original church with Friend's tower;  
painting by Susan Fereday

One of the best known early clergy in George Town was the Rev. John Fereday, who was appointed in 1846. He served for over 25 years, rarely if ever taking a holiday. His area ranged from Exeter to Flinders Island. He had medical skills and combined his duties as chaplain with that of a doctor, which he did free of charge to those who could not afford a practising medic. He took an interest in all things scientific, once going on

an excursion with the botanist William Harvey. His wife Susan ran a school in the town. She sang during the services, and painted many delightful pictures depicting George Town and its surrounds.

John bought "The Grove" for his home, but leased it out when the parsonage was built near the site of the present Council Chambers. When the holiday makers flocked by steamer to George Town during the summer months, John would be found on the wharf greeting the visitors.

In late 1869 payable gold was discovered at Nine Mile Springs east of George Town. Actually it had been known to exist before. John Fereday himself had been in a group of George Town citizens who had discovered gold near the Springs in 1857, and he kept a phial with the specs of gold he had found. He was quick to add the rough miners of The Springs to his flock, and even held shares in a George Town venture to win some gold in what was known as Fereday's



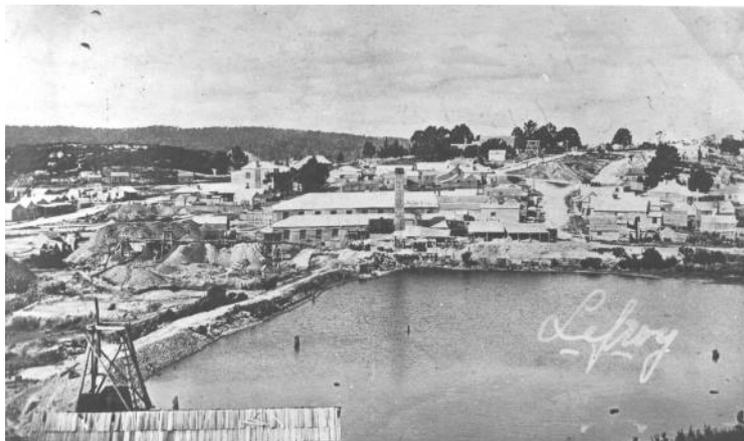
**Regent Square , by Louis Wood. The two story building on the right was originally built for John Youl, while further down is The Grove.**

Gully. However his speculations in gold mining were unsuccessful, and it is probably due to this that he lost possession of The Grove.

It was on his return from Nine Mile Springs in April 1871, together with Dr. Browne, now the Archdeacon, that John was fatally injured. Browne was holding the reins of their gig when the wheel struck a tree stump, throwing the Archdeacon out onto the ground. The horse took fright and bolted. Dr. Browne found the horse further down the track with a broken leg. The carriage had been smashed to pieces, and poor John Fereday lay unconscious. He died a few days later, on Easter Eve, and was deeply mourned, as he was respected by everybody - wealthy and poor.

#### **ESTABLISHING CHURCH BUILDINGS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES**

Finding a replacement for Fereday was very difficult. Few clergy were willing to tackle a parish of such a size. Known as Dorset, the parish stretched from the Tamar



River to Cape Portland, and as far south as Ringarooma. Furthermore, the area was sparsely populated, and the Rector's stipend had to be subsidised with funds from the Archdeaconry. As one clergyman wrote,

The minister of George Town must keep a horse, and a good one, to do the work of this extensive parish. He must have a boat, and the services of a boatman, at times...Now, is it possible to keep the decent household a clergyman should have, and to do these duties on such a stipend? Can a man purchase books and keep pace with the thought of the day? Is he to condemn his family to the want of what are the necessaries of life in this position? Imagine the worry of mind consequent on the cares of making both ends meet.

Consequently, those clergymen who did accept the post were often inexperienced, had of necessity to run a private school to supplement their income, and often did not remain long in the parish.

In the late 1870s the Dorset parish was split into three, with George Town, Lefroy and Pipers River forming the parish of North Dorset.

There had been farmers in the lower part of the Pipers River since the late 1820s, and there had been timber splitters along the East Tamar. Generally, there were until the 1870s very few people living in the parish outside George Town.

The 1870s and 1880s saw considerable development in the area of North Dorset. The need for better navigation on the Tamar River brought more pilots and lighthouse keepers to Low Head. Low Head also was the southern terminus of the telegraph cable link across Bass Strait to Flinders in Victoria. This also brought employment to the area. The company manager, William Warren, lived in George Town and was a Church Warden.

The gold mines at Nine Mile Springs (renamed Lefroy in 1881) and Back Creek brought miners and businesses to these growing villages, as well as increased business to George Town and a market for the farmers at Pipers River. George Town also had an increasing number of holiday makers from Launceston and the Mainland at Christmas. As a result, prosperity increased and these villages now demanded their own churches. This was especially necessary because the roads were so difficult to travel on. It took more than six hours to travel by coach from Lefroy to Launceston, and the road from Lefroy to George Town was almost impassible in winter.

At Low Head the number of pilots and their families, together with the families of employees of the cross Bass Strait cable company, had already necessitated the opening of a school. From the 1850s John Fereday had conducted a part-time school there, and a government school was opened in 1869. The residents now wished for a place of worship, and in 1877 a church was built on land donated by James Long, whose farm occupied most of the Low Head peninsula.

At first the little weatherboard church was shared among the Christian denominations. The Independent minister Charles Price, from Launceston, held services there when he visited Low Head. He had been visiting George Town and Low Head for holidays since the 1840s, and often held services in people's homes. However the Church of England was the only denomination regularly using the Low Head church. In 1884 it was consecrated by Bishop Sandford for the exclusive use of the Church of England, despite Price's protest that it had been built, and contributions had been made, on the understanding the building could be used by other denominations.

Such sharing of buildings was not liked. At Bothwell much argument over the joint use of the church by Anglicans and Presbyterians had resulted in the expulsion of the Anglicans from the building. When it was suggested that the new church under construction in George Town be used by all denominations, it was strongly resisted. Similarly, when in 1887 the Methodists requested use of the Anglican parish hall in George Town to hold a concert to raise funds for their own church, this was refused, after the Rector lectured the vestry on the evils of aiding those in doctrinal error. Competition, not co-operation between the denominations was the name of the game.

The newly consecrated Low Head church was known as All Saints Church, but it was later changed to Christ Church.

In January 1881 plans were made for a church at Lefroy. The bustling mining town quickly held fairs and



Christ Church Low Head

concerts to raise the necessary funds. By October the weatherboard building, designed by Carello Sullivan, one of the mine managers, stood proudly on the brow of the hill overlooking the town. It was consecrated that month and dedicated to St. Andrew.

At Pipers River, the farmers also took steps to have provision for worship. In the early 1870s services were held in the school, which doubled as the public building, and they were taken by the schoolmaster, with occasional visits from clergymen. While no church had been built, by 1897 the clergyman at George Town was taking fortnightly services at Pipers River as well as at Low Head, and weekly services at Lefroy and George Town. It was not until the Twentieth century that moves were made to build a church at Pipers River. In 1906 the corner stone was laid for St. Alban's, which lay across the road from the school, and the church was completed in 1914.

#### **A NEW CHURCH BUILDING FOR GEORGE TOWN**



**St. Andrews Church, Lefroy.**

In January 1881 Archdeacon Francis Hales called a special meeting in George Town. He told the meeting that he had long considered the church building there to be entirely unsuitable for worship and that the foundations made it impossible to adapt the existing building. The building, was along the lines of a protestant preaching hall, with none of the features of the fashionable Gothic style.

It especially lacked a chancel. Francis successfully urged the parishioners to erect a new church with a more suitable design. Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne, who was in George Town on holiday, supported the Archdeacon and donated £10 towards a new building.



St. Albans Church, Pipers River

The George Town parishioners found it much harder to raise funds for their new church than those at Lefroy. George Town was then much smaller than Lefroy, and not all the congregation agreed that their beloved old church needed a replacement.

Moreover there was trouble in the parish. Its latest Rector, Thomas McDowell, had retired in 1879 and his temporary successor, an unordained, but popular trainee, had been removed on the complaint by two of the Church Wardens that he did not know any Greek. This had caused a heated meeting at which parishioners threatened, if their new minister were removed, to secede from the Church of England and set up their own denomination for him to lead. The Bishop supported the Church Wardens, and the threat was not carried out, but George Town was left without a minister.

Nevertheless the fund raising continued, and in February 1883 the foundation stone for a weatherboard building was laid.

Then there was trouble with the contractors, who did not finish the work satisfactorily, and walked away from the contract. The vestry had to borrow money and employ other labourers to complete the building. Finally, the church, of Gothic style, 45 feet long, 22 feet wide and 15 feet high, was opened by Archdeacon Hales in October 1884. It was consecrated in May 1886.

The chancel of the new church contained a stained glass window showing St. Mary Magdelene holding an alibaster box of ointments. The window was donated by Colonel Couran of Geelong in memory of his son in law, the Rev W. Powell, who served briefly as Rector of George Town parish.

The old brick church continued in use, first as a temporary home for the public school, pending the completion of its own premises. It was also converted for use as a hall, with a stage being added, and concerts were held there. Its use as a school was unsatisfactory. The building was cold and damp and had no fireplace for heating. It was eventually demolished.



**St. Mary Magdelene Church, George Town**



### **THE PARISH FALLS ON HARD TIMES**

By the late 1890s the gold at Lefroy was running out. The Back Creek goldfield had long since collapsed. The gradual decline of gold mining affected all the surrounding towns. As the population and wealth declined, the Parish of North Dorset faced a financial crisis. Lefroy had provided the greatest source of parish funds. Even then, the parish's income had rarely been enough to cover the clergyman's stipend, and it had been assisted by contributions from the Archdeaconry. In 1887 the George Town vestry had found it could only afford to pay Miss Richardson, the organist, £2 a year.

Bishop Montgomery, faced with declining funds, and with the Diocese no longer having the means to subsidise the parish, proposed an amalgamation with Lilydale. A hastily called meeting of representatives from the four centres quickly sent a reply, stating that with the depression at Lefroy, the parishioners could not increase their contributions, that it was impossible for a clergyman to cover such an area, and that the proposed changes would mean a reduction in the number of services

in each centre, with a consequent loss of congregation and funds. It insisted the Diocese should increase its subsidy for the ailing parish, a step which no doubt did not impress the Bishop. So, the parish was left to languish. Its boundaries were changed, the Parish extending from the Tamar River to the Little Piper's River and inland as far as East Arm. Hillwood was included with Windermere in the West Tamar parish.

The parish limped into the 20th century, and maintaining the Rector's stipend was always a problem. Sometimes the Rector forgave the debt. At other times he was transferred, leaving the parish to be run by lay people. Despite this, there appears to have been little co-operation between the four centres, which ran as independent vestries, with George Town having the responsibility of maintaining the Rectory.

When the Depression hit in the 1930s the parish finally had to admit it could no longer support a Rector. From 1936 to 1951 the parish was administered from the North Launceston Parish. Pipers River was now separate from George Town. The Reverend Landsdale, from St. George's Invermay, visited the parish once a month to conduct services and attend meetings. Otherwise the services were held by lay readers.

This arrangement continued during the Second World War. Vestry membership now changed. Until 1939 membership had been confined to men. With so many men away at war, from 1942 onwards vestry membership contained mainly women. Females continued to have representatives on the vestry after the men returned from war in 1946.

## **ALUMINIUM AND REVIVAL**

In 1949 the Commonwealth and Tasmanian governments announced a joint venture to build Australia's first aluminium factory at Bell Bay. Plans were made to develop George Town as the location for the workers at the intended factory. In the space of four years George Town grew from a small fishing, holiday and retirement village, into a sizable town.

This new development was reflected in the fortunes of the parish. In 1949 the parish gained its own Rector with the appointment of the Rev. Goodricke. There was a new wave of optimism in the parish. In August 1950 it was decided to build a new Rectory, next to the church. Church lands were sold to raise the funds, and the Rector lent money to the Parish so that it could proceed with the new building..

The 1950s were a period of unprecedented growth. Not only was there rapid growth in George Town, but a new centre, Hillwood, was added to the parish, with the congregation there worshipping in a church built by the Methodist Church in 1932. At first this building was shared with the Methodists, but in later years the Anglicans were the only congregation to use the centre. Lefroy was the only centre not to share in the expansion, and in 1954 it was decided to close St. Andrews Church.



**Hillwood Church**

In 1954 the parish had a women's guild with 30 members and a Sunday school containing 50 children. There was even talk of sharing with the Methodist Church the cost of running a bus from the new housing areas into the town for Sunday services. This new found ecumenical co-operation also extended to the Lutheran Church, which was offered use of the George Town church for its services.

In 1954 the parish organized a Back to George Town weekend to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first Church service in Northern Tasmania, together with a debutante ball, film show and fair.

With the manager of the aluminium works as an active member, the parish received considerable support and help. In 1955 a disused dormitory from the construction site of the new factory was made available for a small cost, and it was erected next to the church for use as the parish hall.

### **DECLINE AND DESPAIR**

The boom in church attendance and funds continued into the 1960s as George Town grew rapidly. New industries were located at Bell Bay, which now developed as the port for Launceston. For a while the parish was able to afford a curate as well as the Rector, but it did not last.

The decline in church attendance after 1960 affected George Town as much as other places. Furthermore, the town itself began to decline as in the 1970s the factories started to shed employees. A greater percentage of workers at these factories lived in Launceston and the West Tamar. By the 1980s the parish was again in financial difficulties.

The bottom of the curve was reached on the night of the 20th June 1994, when the church at George Town was gutted by fire. With the Rector having recently resigned, the parish funds being too low to afford another permanent priest, and the building having been underinsured to save costs, the future looked especially bleak. Furthermore, within the next few years both the Low Head and Pipers River buildings were threatened with closure due to small numbers attending services. The Hillwood congregation also found itself without a building for worship when the Uniting Church decided to sell the church.

**NO, THIS WAS NOT THE END!!**

The hardships which the parish went through in the years 1994-1998 in many ways hardened the resolve of the parish to continue. It also discovered how much support for the parish existed with Christian communities in the town, and other Anglican parishes, who donated furniture, bibles, hymn books and prayer books so that worship in George Town could continue. It also discovered that it would have to help itself if it were to survive.



The next few years witnessed a co-operation between the various centres of the parish as has never existed before. It saw the number of church attendees grow in each centre, which ended threats to close Low Head and Pipers River.

Members of the congregation began evangelism as a means of spreading the Christian message. From small beginnings, the parish saw many Alpha courses run as introductions to Christianity for non-believers, as well as developing courses for church goers.

Other forms of outreach have developed more strongly. There was regular outreach at Ainslie Hospital, members actively engaged in Mission for Seamen, and a women's group and men's breakfast group were formed.

In March 2000 the George Town congregation moved into its new church building, after almost six years of worshipping in the 'temporary' parish hall, which had been purchased from the aluminium factory in 1955. After a painful and long process, it finally was able to see its dream of a replacement building realized. The building was dedicated on the 2nd September 2000 by Bishop John Harrower.

Despite these developments, the rapidly increasing cost of insurance and the rise in Rectors' stipends again threatened the financial viability of the parish. As the George Town parish approached the 200th anniversary of Christian worship, it became obvious that it could no longer afford a rector, and a laity run local ministry team appeared the only way open. Fortunately two Launceston parishes were considering amalgamation, and the George Town Parish decided to join with these, rather than face the future alone.

On Sunday 25th November 2004, at a special service to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the first church service conducted in Northern Tasmania, Bishop Harrower inaugurated the new Parish of Riverlinks, consisting of the former parishes of East Launceston, George Town and Trevallyn-Riverside.



### **Acknowledgements**

State Library of Tasmania, For permission to use the pictures on the front cover and on pages 2 and 8.

Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales for permission to use the picture on page 9.

Gloria Kay for permission to use the photos on pages 16, 17 and 21.

© Peter Cox 2006

Published by the Anglican Parish of Riverlinks

