

St. Paul's Church of England / Oatley Anglican Church - History

Corner of Rosa & Neville Streets / 57 Rosa Street Oatley NSW 2223

My observation and research – Ian Childs 2025

The foundation stone was laid in 1911 with the original church building being a Weatherboard structure with an Iron Roof located at the street corner and with the entry doors at the East end.

The hall at the Western side was transported in in the late 1950's asbestos fibro walls and asbestos (super 6) roofing. A brick entry with double hardwood doors was added to the South end. The North side of the lot was used for parking and also had the blower for the organ. On the lot adjoining to the North was the tennis court and the ladies from church often met and played tennis there.

St. Paul's started as a sub-parish of St. Georges at Hurstville with a curate based at St. John's Penshurst and each Sunday he took services at St. Johns Penshurst, St. Peter's Mortdale, Holy Trinity Peakhurst and in the 1930's St. Aidan's Hurstville Grove was added followed by All Saints Oatley West and St. Bede's Beverly Hills in the 1940's.

The rector (1929~1945) William Siddons (1945~1947) V. A. Evans resided in the rectory at Ocean Street Penshurst and was a very busy man supported by lay-preachers (St. Paul's Oatley included Norm Austin who was also Church Warden) and later a catechist. Oatley held morning service at 8am, then a 3pm Sunday School and a 7pm Evening Service. Cars were few and far between so families spent much of their Sunday's walking to and from Church with many attending all of the services.

St. Paul's Oatley Church had a choir which sang mornings and evenings with many of the Sunday School teachers also being part of the choir.

Sunday School picnics were combined with all of the seven Churches and held at the Royal National Park at Audley, with a train carriage reserved for each of the Churches.

Until the hall was obtained in the late 1950's, great use was made of the Oatley School of Arts Hall (used on Sundays by the Salvation Army and is now the Oatley branch library) for the Annual tea meetings and concerts, as well as the Mothers Union Church Bazaar with the money raised going toward Church upkeep. The youth fellowship also held their dances there.

The seven Churches separated, and we had Mortdale, Oatley and Oatley West (1947~1950) Rev. S. N. Paddison, and this was further reduced to just Oatley & Oatley West (1953~1954).

Rev. Reg Hanlon with his wife Shirley returned in 1955 from overseas mission to take up the role of minister at St. Paul's Oatley. At the time there was deficient fund coming in from service collections and so this deficit relied upon St. Georges Hurstville's financial support.

This wasn't good enough for Reg who was very overseas mission focussed, so he demanded that 50% of all collections be prescribed for CMS. Within 6-months this turned around with the giving not only able to fully support the operation of St. Paul's Oatley but with an equal amount going to overseas mission.

Some memories of Reg are how the wardens were instructed to close the entrance doors as soon as the service started, this meant that any latecomer would open the door and be backlit by the ray of sunlight streaming in and their embarrassment and the whispers and giggles from the rest of us resulted in very few repeat latecomers. Now the congregation included a young man called John (Chappo) Chapman who attributed his own view on prompt Church

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attendance and starting services on time, to Reg's edict.

Another great memory is when I (Ian Childs) was 10 (1960) and Manchester United were playing soccer at Sydney Cricket Grounds on a Sunday only and my Dad decided we were going to watch it. Next Sunday, Reg challenged Dad with his "why weren't you at Church last Sunday?" So Dad told him and Reg said "What do you think Jesus thought about that!" Dad responded with "He loved it – he was right there with, and in me!" Reg never challenged Dad that I know of after that.

David & Ruth Deasey's Dad John was a Warden with Norm Austin – both were school principals in their day jobs. Then Norm left and Mr Hurford took over his role. His son Richard was my accompanist on the old blower organ and Richard went into ministry retiring as the Bishop of Bathurst.

Richard was my accompanist when I did boy soprano solos at St. Andrews Cathedral Sydney, as arranged by our choirmaster Lance Lloyd, though at the time my sister Julie was regarded as a better organist than Richard but over time, I understand he improved.

In 1958 Dad & Mum sent me to CEBS at St. Paul's on Monday nights and the Leader Gordon Bowles was pretty short-handed, so convinced Dad to join as a leader. After a bit he took over when Gordon left and was joined by Royle Hawkes who became leader when Dad became Area Commissioner for CEBS and was instrumental in the foundation of Camp Wanawong at Loftus (now Youthworks), with Dad having me help Peter Leithead, his son Andrew and himself build the chapel there. When Royle left, Dad became the local lead as well as commissioner.

St. Paul's got right behind the Billy Graham Crusade in 1959 and a great effort was made regarding preparation and follow up. All of the Choir was in the Crusade Choir including my sister Julie, Dad and myself.

Reg decided to move on in 1961 and we got George Robinson (I still chat occasionally with their son Michael) and after a bit we had Rix & Irma Warren who came from the mission field and after a stint returned to SAMS and off to Argentina they went with heaps of support from St. Paul's (their son Peter heads up mission with YWAM and is based in Denver, we still often chat).

In 1962 the old Church building was relocated on the block and became a hall and the new "A frame" went up aligning with George Robinson's tenure. There were quite a few working bees to refurbish the old church building as a hall and Dad & I, with Johnny Byrne's got the job of painting the roof (it was Johnny who spilt the tin of paint).

After Rix & Irma Warren, we had the Evangelical Charismatic Laurence Lovell who came straight from England in about 1963 with his wife Mary and some of the boys Tim (Baptist minister at Maroochydore and prior to that with Vinyard in the US), David (worships at Southerland Growth Centre), Simon (with YWAM Denver) and Jake (Police Detective)

Lawrence & Mary (Mary was a GP and worked out of Dr Muir's practice at Oatley). Lawrence used to get down to Oatley Pub around closing and used to bring the drunks home to the rectory. He introduced small groups as a prerequisite to anyone doing anything in ministry including Sunday School, Church Band, Welcomers, in fact all serving activities. The Church supported quite a number of overseas missions, and it was refreshing to hear them when they came through whist on furlough. Many of these missionaries had come up through St. Paul's Oatley as had quite a few who attended Bible College, etc.

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Some notable catechists and members who came through St. Paul's Oatley including Stuart Langshaw (who's Dad was the Minister at St. Georges Hurstville and he ended as a Professor at Trinity College in Adelaide), Ron Watts (Dad of Sarah Atkinson – who went on to be prominent with MAF), Greg Cox (son of Colin & Pat Cox – who was a MAF pilot in New Guinea), Frank Hawkes (brother of Royle) who became a missionary in New Guinea and Fiji. Then there was John Chapman (who's exposure to John Stott changed his life focus), Richard Hurford (renowned recital organist, Rector of Armidale, then St. James Sydney and then Bishop of Bathurst – thanks Christine for keeping his head from swelling too much).

With the endowment and some fundraising, the yard between the old church (now Sunday School Hall) was enclosed and roofed over to become the "Dorothy Woodhill Community Centre". At the same time the old hall was demolished (asbestos hazard removed) and the carpark added (condition of development)

The church has a couple of heritage listed artifacts that must be retained being the memorial baptismal font (in the yard at the West end of the old Church (Hall) and the Eagle Lectern.

A Montessori Pre School leased the old Church and when they decided to relocate, the Church Council led by Lawrence decided to create the ARNDU Pre School as an outreach ministry. The preschool was established as a non-profit where fees would be at market rate but would subsidise the less fortunate as well as provide overseas mission support. Somehow this did get skewed when a new rector, Mark Eaton came in the mid 1990's . Not sure how but mission contributions as a portion of contributions ceased entirely and thankfully many of the parishioners switched to Direct Giving. Arndu turned from an outreach into a secular business with Church links with also many of the Church activities forced away from the Church buildings (Ministry to Seniors had to move to the RSL as the insurance policy was changed to remove them from PL cover – evidently this was attributed to Arndu complaints that staff couldn't get into the carpark). By 2005 St. Paul's Oatley had no youth coming (they'd mostly gone elsewhere) and only had the 8am and 10am services. Then John Whitbread approached the Bishop and Mark Eaton was removed with Ted Potter filling in until Craig Olliffe took over, after which there was some recovery and evening service returned.