

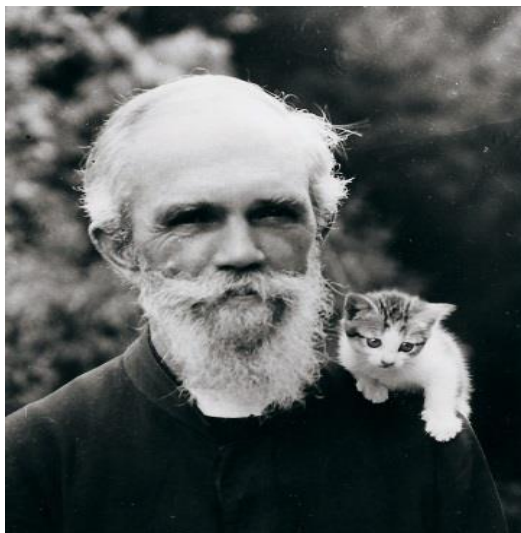
The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Benjamin Thornton Dudley 1839 - 1901

Archdeacon of Auckland 1883-1901

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**Benjamin Thornton Dudley
(1838-1901);
worked for the Melanesian Mission
1858-63,
and was Vicar of Holy Sepulchre
1865-97,
and Archdeacon of Auckland
1883-1901.**
*Image courtesy of
Auckland Anglican Diocesan Archives.*

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands prominently on Khyber Pass Road, Auckland. It was in the news during 2011, when Bishop Sir Paul Reeve's tangi was held there.

But what do we know of the man who led the parish that built the church in 1881? Benjamin Thornton Dudley was a member of a family of silk merchants who lived west of Birmingham in England. His grandfather Benjamin Dudley, according to a modern historian, 'liked not Romanists.' To give status to his family he sent some of his sons to university and subsequent service in the Church, rather than having them

remain in the 'trade.' One son became a vicar in Hampshire. Another, Benjamin Wooley Dudley, became curate to an absentee minister in Ticehurst, Sussex. He was paid £150 a year, plus surplice fees, but because of a growing family found it hard to make ends meet. So, in 1850 he took the position of chaplain on the 'Cressy', one of the first four ships to Christchurch.

His 11-year-old son, **Benjamin Thornton Dudley** (Dudley), kept a diary during the journey to New Zealand. This diary survived, with its child-like interests: 'Our first mate had a swing put up for the children today, but it turned about too much to have a good swing on it ... one of the steerage passengers was tried for stealing a blanket, and he was sentenced to be handcuffed and put in irons ... one of the midshipmen fell overboard. They lowered a boat very soon, and he was picked up a long way astern, just as he was sinking, but he soon revived again.'

Dudley came to Auckland after a short stay at Christ's College. There he met the Rev'd John Patteson (later Bishop of Melanesia). He took an interest in the Melanesian Mission, making several voyages (under sail) to Melanesia on-board the Southern Cross by the time he was eighteen years old. Dudley vividly described these voyages and the dangers involved: 'I can recall many occasions when the situation seemed critical - as when a party of men on shore would prepare to shoot, and we only got away just in time; or of swimmers with the intention of seizing the boat; there were strange characters

roaming the seas in those days.' When the Southern Cross ran on to a reef he wrote 'How were we to know that her bottom, after all the bumping, was fit to get the ship back to NZ? The Bishop was equal to the occasion. He caused the ship to be laid over as far as was safe, and then, having stripped himself to tweed trousers and jersey, amid exclamations of admiration, made a succession of dives feeling over the whole keel and forward part of the vessel, much to the detriment of his hands which were cut to pieces with the jagged copper, and ascertained the exact condition of her bottom.'

Dudley's diary in 1858 described his fourth voyage to Melanesia, this time with Bishop Selwyn, gathering young men from the islands, and bringing them back to Kohimarama for education. The journey began with 'hunting for our crew among the public houses of Auckland', with Bishop Selwyn on duty the first night, as all the officers were drunk.

In 1861, at the age of 23, Dudley was ordained deacon by Bishop Patteson in old St. Paul's Church in Auckland. The New Testament he was given, signed by Bishop Patteson, is in the Auckland Diocesan Archives. At the time of his ordination, he was a member of the Melanesian Mission staff, but he resigned in 1863 due to his frail health. He retained a strong interest in Melanesia and became the Auckland secretary and treasurer for the Mission for the rest of his life. He had regular articles in the Church Gazette, conveying stories of the Melanesian Mission. In 1872, after the murder of Bishop Patteson, he was nominated as the next Bishop of Melanesia, but he declined the position because of his health.

Upon his return to Auckland in 1863 he became secretary and assistant to Bishop Selwyn and was deacon-in-charge of St Mary's Church in Parnell, following the retirement of the Rev'd G. A. Kissling. In 1864 he married Marion Churton, whose father was minister at St Paul's Church. In

1865, while he was still a deacon, Dudley began his ministry at Holy Sepulchre Church. He was ordained priest on 22 September 1865. His work at Holy Sepulchre lasted 36 years.

The first Church of the Holy Sepulchre was opened on 27 August 1865, in Symonds Street, just above the cemetery. From its earliest days the title was shortened to 'St Sepulchre's', and later, on the Khyber Pass site, it became known as 'St Seps' to hundreds of young folk who flocked there on Saturday nights in the 1950s for Saturday night dances.

In 1865, the communicant's roll at Holy Sepulchre was 25, rising to over 80 by 1869. The Sunday School roll was 117, with an average attendance of 67, and the day school had 43 pupils. This day school closed when the Government withdrew the teacher's salary in 1868. At first the parish could only provide one third of Dudley's stipend, but the population in the district was growing rapidly, and by 1870 the whole of Dudley's stipend was paid by Holy Sepulchre.

Dudley had a missionary view westward from Holy Sepulchre. A fortnightly service was begun at Morningside in 1870 with a congregation of 20. That grew rapidly into what is now St Luke's, Mt Albert. Dudley's work included ministry at an Old People's Home and the Hospital. In 1872 he began services in Newton, at the junction of Ponsonby and Great North Roads. This work led to the subsequent building of the Church of the Epiphany.

At Holy Sepulchre, attendances had grown to 160, so the church was enlarged with seating for another 60 people. But it was still considered to be a temporary building. Dudley also began ministry at Mt Eden, at first using a schoolroom. Later, St Barnabas' Church in Parnell was transported by bullock cart to Mount Eden and is now part of the enlarged church on Mt Eden Road.

Dudley's sphere of ministry expanded further with services at 'the Whau' (Avondale) and Waikumete. In 1879 his ministry extended to Helensville. In 1909, when Marion died, this comment was published in the Church Gazette: 'About the years 1878-1879 the parish was a very large one, and Mr Dudley and his assistant minister used to hold four or five services and ride 16 to 48 miles (on horseback) on a Sunday. When the day's work was over, they had supper in St Sepulchre's old parsonage, and then being very tired and weary men, they would rest and Mrs Dudley would read to them. She was also a very capable storyteller and would recount little experiences in a way that delighted.'

Dudley maintained his interest in Melanesia. In 1880 he led a party of about 50 persons, travelling from Auckland in the Southern Cross, to Norfolk Island for the dedication of the Chapel of St Barnabas. Bishop John Selwyn, son of Bishop George Selwyn, was by then the Bishop of Melanesia. The dedication service was a magnificent occasion.

On the return trip the passengers on board the Southern Cross had a little adventure. The girls had slept on deck, near the ship's compass. The boots they were wearing had heavy steel heels on them, which had the effect of the ship sailing off course and finishing its journey at Tauranga. Luckily, they sailed past Great Barrier Island! A poem about the incident, attributed to Dudley, was published in the New Zealand Herald. It included these lines:

Ladies, beware! And when ye mind
To trust yourselves to wave and wind,
And wish your home again to find,
Please leave your steel heeled boots behind!

The present Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built in 1881. The building in Symonds Street was by that time too small for the congregation. It was retained as a Sunday School centre. Bishop Cowie, a great friend of the Dudleys, opened the

new church on St Peter's Day, 29 June 1881, preaching at both services. He spoke of St Peter as 'the rock' on which the Church was built, and commented on the important role that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would play in the growing Auckland.

The bishop felt so much at home in Dudley's congregation that he returned to the parish every Saint Peter's Day for some years, to celebrate both the opening of the church and the anniversary of his consecration as bishop. Mrs Cowie used to bring a huge bunch of white camellias from Bishopscourt for the decoration of the church, as flowers were hard to obtain in late June. One of the camellia bushes still grows today below the kitchen window at Bishopscourt.

In July 1883 Cowie appointed Dudley as Archdeacon of Auckland and Vicar General. In this position Dudley followed several illustrious men: Archdeacons J. C. Abraham, G. A. Kissling, J. F. Lloyd and Dr Maunsell.

The 1880s and 90s were the high point in parish life, before the population around the church began to decline. Dudley's frail health was beginning to affect him. But there were still some exciting developments, such as the 'Saint Sepulchre's Bicycle Club' - mainly women. There were other great occasions, such as the Harvest Home festival, which was very popular. Photographs show the decorated church, with sheaves of wheat, loaves of home-baked bread, and much else. Dudley became quite ill in 1898. In September Doctor Grindler wrote a certificate stating that 'Archdeacon Dudley is suffering from the effect of overwork and requires at least one year's rest to restore him to his usual state of health.' Dudley had no money. He had written an article in the Church Gazette many years before, asking 'How are going to look after the older clergy?' Now it was his turn to be in need. A fund was opened, and parishioners were invited to contribute. This fund enabled Dudley to afford a trip back to England, from where he wrote

regular letters to Bishop Cowie. These were published in the Church Gazette and told of meeting his old friend Sarah Selwyn, his visit to the grave of Bishop Selwyn, and much more.

He returned to Auckland towards the end of 1899. He never recovered fully from his illness.

On 21 April he had preached his final sermon on the text 'Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.'

He died on 24 April 1901 at the age of 63.

He was buried at St Stephen's Church in Parnell. It is a sad grave, with the cross erected by the clergymen of Auckland lying broken beside it. There are other significant graves there as well: Bishop and Mrs Cowie, Archdeacon Clarke of Waimate, Vicesimus Lush, George and Margaret Kissling and others.

Dudley's grave is that of a man who is sometimes remembered in the Diocese of Auckland, sometimes forgotten. May he rest in peace and may his good deeds follow him.



Diocesan Leaders: Auckland members of the General Synod 1895.

From left: M E J Cox, W S Cochrane, and W J Speight.

Seated: The Revd George MacMurray, Colonel TM Haultain, Bishop and Primate W G Cowie, Ven. Benjamin Dudley, and the Revd William Beatty.

Image courtesy of Auckland Anglican Diocesan Archives.