

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

Here, There and Back Again

(Saint Saviour's Church, Lyttleton)

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Churches do not usually leave home and return, but then St Saviour's has proved that it's not your usual church. Built in 1885 for the Parish of West Lyttelton, it departed in pieces for the Cathedral Grammar School in 1976 where it was established as their chapel and now plans are in hand to establish it on the site of the now demolished Lyttelton Church of the Most Holy Trinity. Residents of Lyttelton make this trip on a daily basis. It is however rather unusual to do it first when you are ninety and then make the journey back when you are one hundred and twenty-seven years old.

The original impetus for the building of a Church in West Lyttelton came from Bishop Harper's determination to provide services and pastoral care for the seamen who visited the port. As early as 1875, Bishop Harper wrote to his son Henry William suggesting that there might be enough funds for him to live in Lyttelton and continue his duties as Archdeacon,¹ as a result of the generosity of the first Incumbent of Lyttelton. Benjamin Woolley Dudley had gifted some sections from his original purchase of Rural Section 40 as endowment for a Church in West Lyttelton. It was not however until 1879 that the Revd. Arthur Davidson was appointed chaplain to various public institutions that included the seamen of Lyttelton. Davidson had previous experience in similar positions in Southampton and Plymouth but when he was appointed to Akaroa in 1882, Harper began to look more seriously about attaching this work to the Parish of Lyttelton.²

Harper's plan was to combine the care of the seafarers with the Dudley endowment and with a guarantee from Church Property Trustees and private subscriptions. With the additional chaplaincies of the Goal and the Orphanage, he believed there was just enough to support a clergyman. It was not easily done. There had to be agreement between all the interested parties so that the finances that were necessary to put the plan into action would all come together at the same time. Progress was slow and by October 1883 the terms of Dudley's endowment were as clear as they had been at the outset – no church, no money. That is, until the church was built it was not possible to access the endowment funds that were needed to finance a clergyman.

So, Harper decided he would procure plans for a Church, and so on December 22, 1883, he wrote to Cyril Julian Mountfort asking him to: 'Prepare a plan of a Church to be erected on the Church site in West Lyttelton. The Church should be able to accommodate from 150 to 200 worshippers and must be built of wood with stone or concrete foundations which might be taken in hand with as little delay as possible and admit of being added to, when there may be sufficient funds for the purpose.'³

By January 9th, 1884, he had seen the plans and was convinced that 'a Church built in accordance with them will answer every purpose.'⁴

However, there was still the question of the relationship of the church to the Parish of

Lyttelton. There was concern that if the planned Chaplain was appointed Assistant Curate of Lyttelton, work amongst the seafarers would take up too much time, and there would not be enough attention paid to other Parish matters. Harper did not believe this would eventuate as the establishment of the 'Steam Service' meant 'that sailors who come to the port are not detained there as they were heretofore when the only vessels were sailing vessels.'⁵

There was also the necessity of raising funds so that the Church could be built. On May 2nd, 1885, a committee consisting of Revd. J. Townsend, Revd. E. E. Chambers, and Messrs H. N. Nalder, H. J. Chapman, Derbridge, Helps, Ticehurst, Ritchey, Browning and Turpin was formed 'for taking immediate steps for the erection of church in West Lyttelton, to seat 222, and collecting funds for the same.'⁶ By the end of the same month, C. J. Mountfort was authorized to call tenders for the church in both wood and brick. There was about £400 in hand from subscriptions, outside contributions and a grant from Synod.⁷ Bishop Harper was also writing to his contact at the Missions to Seamen in London asking for books suitable to distribute to the seamen of the Port and keeping Commander W. Dawson of the Royal Navy up to date with his plans for the West Lyttelton Church.⁸

On 8th June 1885, the tender notice appeared in the Press, indicating that plans and specifications could be viewed both in Dampier's Bay at Revd. E. E. Chambers' house and at B. W. Mountfort's offices in Cathedral Square. Tenderers had fourteen days to get their prices in.⁹ The New Zealand Church News, published June 1885, reported that the building, at an estimated cost of £650, was 'about to be commenced without delay.'¹⁰

The tender of £673.13s.0d, that included the leveling of the site, from Messrs Sutton and

Weastall, the local undertakers and builders, was accepted on 5th August.¹¹

Fund raising was varied. Subscriptions were sought and obtained from both the people of Lyttelton and the wider Anglican Diocese. A concert was held in the Oddfellows Hall that included the comedietta 'Box and Cox' and Dr H. H. Chapman gave a lecture on 'Heat and Cold; or Icebergs, Volcanoes and Earthquakes'¹²



St Saviour. West Lyttelton. 1897. from the north-west.

The Church was consecrated on 29th October 1885 by the Primate of New Zealand and Bishop of the Diocese, Henry John Chitty Harper. According to the report in the Star he preached impressively on the subject of church building and the extension of church work. The Cathedral Choir sang, George Frederick Tendall presided at the organ and a large number of clergy were present, including the Dean the Very Rev Henry Jacobs, Archdeacon Edward Atherton Lingard and the Precentor of the Cathedral Revd. W. H. Elton.¹³

The church was a work in progress. On the day of consecration only the transepts and chancel were completed, but Cyril Mountfort's original



St Saviour, West Lyttelton, 1940, from the south-east.

plan had included a 30-foot extension to complete the nave. It was never built. Sutton and Weastall completed the smaller building with its plastered interior walls, and rimu and kauri woodwork. They also supplied the furnishings. The Star commented that it was a lofty building for its size, well ventilated, with good acoustics and excellently lit by the windows.¹⁴

In parallel with the building of the Church there was also a division of the Parish of Lyttelton. The people of West Lyttelton had petitioned Synod to take charge of their own affairs and so by the time of the consecration they had been constituted a parochial district.

St Saviour's connection to the Port of Lyttelton, its workers, seafarers and locals is clearly seen in the Parish registers. The first marriage on 1st December 1886 was between William Sinclair, a lumper¹⁵ (son of William a shipwright and his wife Elizabeth Wilson) to Sarah Keele, (daughter of William, a house carpenter and his wife Ellen Bacon). The first burial on 9 May 1886 was of Alexander Reid, a resident of Dampier's Bay and the Harbour Board Pilot. The first baptisms however took place in the newly constituted parish, before the church was built. They were probably performed in the Orphanage where Chambers took services and held Sunday School. Again, the West Lyttelton seafaring and local connections are obvious. Those baptized were

Theodora Annie Millicent Ritchey, daughter of the Master of the Orphanage, Theodore Harold and his wife Jessie Elma; Ruth Wilson, daughter of Eli, a railway porter and Ede his wife and Isabella Edith Ruth Duff, daughter of James, a shoemaker and Isabella his wife, from the Chatham Islands.¹⁶



Revd. Edward Eliot Chambers

Edward Eliot Chambers, the Curate of Lyttelton and subsequently the first Vicar of West Lyttelton, was the right person in the right place at the right time. He already had the experience for the job. He had joined the navy when he was thirteen years old and, by the time he left in 1870, he had risen to the rank of lieutenant. He spent time as a lay assistant at St Mary's Devonport, in the Diocese of Exeter, before immigrating to become the assistant curate of Ross in South Westland. This was followed by four years in Rakaia before his move to Lyttelton, where he would spend the next thirty-six years. Four months after he arrived, he became the Honorary Chaplain to N. Battery, and was at various times Chaplain to the permanent Artillery in the South Island and acting Chaplain to the Royal Navy.¹⁷

He encouraged church parades, and it was through these naval connections that the Antarctic Explorers became associated with this Church. Although it is often said that they worshipped there, this cannot be proved until

the Service registers are able to be examined,¹⁸ but what is clear is that Chambers conducted services on board in 1901 before Robert Falcon Scott's Discovery sailed, in 1908 when Nimrod set off with Ernest Shackleton and again in 1910 when Scott's crew headed south in Terra Nova.

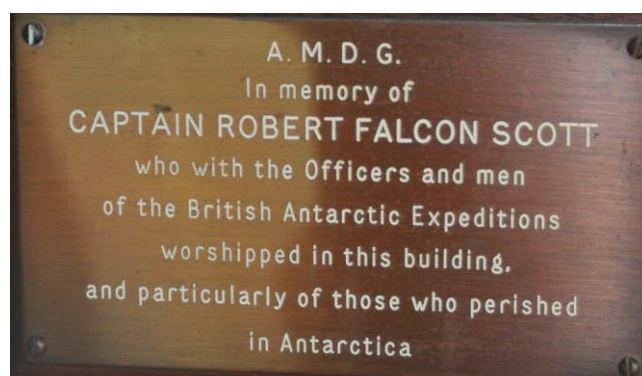
On 21st December 1901, Morning Prayer was held in the men's quarters on the Discovery with the Mayors of Lyttelton and Christchurch in attendance. Chambers read the service, the Bishop's Chaplain Canon Pollock read the lesson and Bishop Julius preached on the words from the 139th Psalm: 'If I take wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy right-hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.' Immediately prior to the Blessing he promised the men that prayers would be offered for them each week in Christchurch Cathedral.¹⁹

On December 31st, 1908, the 'strong voices of the men rose above the exterior sounds of harbour activity, of the thump of hammers and the rattle and snarls of steam winches' as the officers, scientists and men assembled in uniform as Bishop Julius, Chambers and Charles Coates the Vicar of Lyttelton, conducted the farewell service on the poop deck.

Julius preached on the fifth verse of Psalm 37 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and he shall bring it to pass' and Chambers recited the prayers.²⁰

Shortly after eight bells on the 27th of December 1910, the members of Scott's expedition and the crew of the Terra Nova gathered with E. Eliot Chambers on the poop deck and sang 'Eternal Father, strong to save' listened to the 121st psalm, and to Bishop Julius as he reminded them that they were not insignificant in the eyes of God, despite the vastness of nature what they would experience. Julius commended them to God's protection and his loving care.²¹

Just over two years later, St Saviour's, Holy Trinity, St John's Presbyterian and the Wesleyan Church in Lyttelton all made reference to the death of Captain Scott in their morning services on 12 February 1913 as did churches of all denominations throughout the city. Eliot Chambers took as his text 'So he giveth his beloved sleep' and spoke impressively of the expedition's magnificent courage, splendid devotion to duty and concluded that at the end they had died nobly and well. The Editor of The New Zealand Church News reflected that their deaths were not a defect, but a victory, that 'the great idea that impelled them onwards, for which they renounced comfort, safety, home and everything that most of us prize, was a triumphant witness that man's aspirations are above material things.'²²



Plaque from the Porch of St Saviour as the Cathedral Grammar School Chapel.

In 1975, following the re-combining of the two Lyttelton Parishes, it was decided to close St Saviour's and offer the church to another part of the Diocese. Dismantled into eight pieces it made the trip at snail's pace on 22nd and 23rd January 1976 over Evans Pass and through the outskirts of Christchurch to its next location on the corner of Park Terrace and Chester Street. Once re-assembled on a new foundation, at a cost of about \$20,000 it became the Cathedral Grammar School Chapel and was officially opened by the Bishop of Christchurch, the Right Rev W. A. Pyatt on 26 June 1976.²³ All the furniture from the original church was also

transported onto the new site, and will be transported back again, except for the altar. This altar was gifted to the Chapel of the Snows at McMurdo Station in Antarctica which was destroyed by fire on 22 August 1978.²⁴

In 2012 the Cathedral Grammar School advised the Diocese of Christchurch that the St Saviour's Chapel was no longer large enough for their school, and that although it had suffered only minor damage (in the earthquake), remediation of the land would mean that it would have to be moved. The school offered it for use elsewhere. The Church Property Trustees decided that it

would, most appropriately, be returned to Lyttelton. It was deconsecrated on 30 July 2012.

Those who remember St Saviour's will be delighted to see it back again. Those who watched Holy Trinity crumble in the wake of the 2010-2011 earthquakes are pleased to know that there will be a place to worship in again and to share with the local community. It is planned to turn the church around on its original east-west axis to make better use of the space, and to include some items from Holy Trinity in its refurbishment.

Once more it will have to make the journey in pieces.

Endnotes:

¹Harper, HJC to HW Harper, March 18, 1875. BHOLB6 pp311-308

² Davidson, Arthur *in* Blain Biographical Directory of Anglican Clergy in the Pacific

http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/directory see also Harper, H J C to A Davidson 29 April 1881. BHOLB11p123; Harper, HJC to EA Scott 15 October 1881 BHOLB12p216

³ Harper, HJC to CJ Mountfort 22 December 1883 BHOLB17p162

⁴ Harper, HJC to CJ Mountfort 9 January 1884 BHOLB17p209-210

⁵ Harper, HJC to Archdeacon of Akaroa 30 July 1884 BHOLB19 p 56-5

⁶ *Star* 2 May 1885

⁷ *Star* 29 May 1885

⁸ Harper, HJC to Commander W. Dawson 29 May 1885 BHOLB20p152-153

⁹ *Press* 8 June 1885 Cyril Mountfort was the son of Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort and worked in his father's firm. BW Mountfort was overseas at the time that HJC Harper made his initial approach concerning plans for a West Lyttelton Church. There is no reason to doubt that it was CJ Mountfort's plans were that that were used for West Lyttelton. See also *Star* 30 October 1885

¹⁰ *The New Zealand Church News* June 1885, p86

¹¹ *The New Zealand Church News* July 1885 p99; *Press* 5 August 1885

¹² *The New Zealand Church News* July 1885 p 99; *Press* 12 August 1885; *Press* 2 October 1885

¹³ *Press* 29 October 1885, 30 October 1885; *Star* 30 October 1885

¹⁴ *Star* 30 Oct 1885 and *Lyttelton Times* quoted in *The New Zealand Church News* Nov 1885.

¹⁵ A person who loads and unloads vessels

¹⁶ St Saviour's West Lyttelton Parish Registers. Transcripts held at the Christchurch City Libraries Aotearoa-NZ Section used as there is presently no access to the original registers

¹⁷ Chambers, Edward Eliot *in* Blain Biographical Directory of Anglican Clergy in the Pacific http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/directory

¹⁸ At the time of writing the Christchurch Anglican Diocesan Archives are not able to be accessed. They were retrieved from the “Red Zoned” Central Business District (CBD) of Christchurch following the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011.

¹⁹ *Star* 21 December 1901

²⁰ *Star* 31 December 1908; *Otago Daily Times* 6 January 1908

²¹ *Press* 28 November 1910

²² *The New Zealand Church News* March 1, 1913

²³ CGS History *Press* 23 Jan 1976; *Star* 22 January 1976; *Press* 23 January 1976

²⁴ Chapel of the Snows destroyed <http://www.southpolestation.com/trivia/history/chapel.html>

A temporary Chapel in a Quonset hut was then established until the opening of the new Chapel of the Snows on 29 January 1989. This temporary chapel was destroyed by fire in 1991. It is not clear whether the altar was in this temporary chapel at the time of the fire. It does not appear to be the altar that is in use in the present Chapel of the Snows.