

Chapter 3

THE COLONIAL INCUMBENTS: 1878–1893

FOR the citizens of Mitcham two events of considerable importance took place during the last decades of the nineteenth century: the horsetrams began a regular service between Adelaide and Upper Mitcham in February 1879, and in March 1883 the first stage of the railway line to Melbourne was officially opened. This latter event precipitated a land subdivision boom along much of its length leading to closer settlement, particularly in the Hills. In turn, this led to a need for increased ministry by the incumbent of the Parish of Mitcham, who was also Priest-in-Charge of the Hills Mission District.

THE INCUMBENCY OF JOHN FRANCIS HOCTER (1878–1883)

Whilst the Election Committee endeavoured to find a new minister to replace the disgraced Reverend Professor Henry Read, the Vicar-General promised to provide ‘clerical supplies’ for the morning services for a month, and requested the Wardens to provide ‘lay help’ for the evening services. After several setbacks the Committee recommended the nomination of Reverend J. F. Hocter, M.A., then incumbent of Christ Church at Mount Gambier.

At the time of Read’s resignation a contract with David Deans for the repairs to the Church costing £200 had been signed ‘with work to begin immediately’; but under the ‘changed circumstances’ it was resolved that it would be ‘desirable to delay the work for a month’. This in turn compounded the problem of installing the new organ, which had arrived on the 10th June and been unloaded from the ship. It could not be erected in its permanent position against the eastern wall until the repairs to the Church were complete and a special platform constructed upon which it was to be placed. The valuable organ would have to be brought up to the Church, some seats removed so that it could be unpacked and examined by Mr MacKenzie, the organ-builder, then stored until the dust and debris had settled. The Organ Subscription Fund had raised only £171 and it had been necessary to increase the overdraft at the bank ‘for payment of accounts due on the new organ’.

Repairs costing nearly £34 were needed to the Parsonage before the new minister and his family moved in. By the time Hocter chaired his first Easter Vestry on 15th April 1879, St Michael’s had a total debt of £278 11s 10d for which the Wardens were personally responsible, any overdraft upon the Bank being ‘entirely at their own risk’. Much of Reverend Francis Hocter’s incumbency was spent lurching from one financial crisis to another – brought about, in no small part, by the enormous debt owing on the new organ. Our scribe takes up the story.

17th October 1878

My very dearest Cousin,

After many months without a resident minister our new incumbent was inducted on 4th October. Although his full name is John Francis Hocter, he prefers to be called Francis [Fig. 3-1]. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, where he took his B.A. degree in 1871, and more recently his M.A. Before coming to South Australia he served as deacon and priest at Ossory. Upon his arrival in the Colony in July 1873 he accepted the incumbency of the copper-mining town of Kadina, which includes the Doora Mines at Pittenweem. For the past four years he has been at Mount Gambier and McDonnell Bay in the SE near our border with the Colony of Victoria. You may recall that two of our former ministers, Messrs Needham and Andrews, both went from Mitcham to Mount Gambier: now the process has been reversed!¹

The Hocter family has settled in well to life in Mitcham. He is a young Irishman in his early thirties, with a wife named Katherine Matilda and three little children: Robert is four, Caroline will be three next January and baby Winifred recently celebrated her first birthday.²

The new Bishop organ is a joy to behold and has a wondrous beauty in its tone. I enclose a drawing of it so that you may gain a better understanding of its appearance [Fig. 3-2]. We had the pleasure of hearing the organ for the first time during Mr Hocter’s induction. The organist from St Peter’s Cathedral, Mr Arthur Boulton, played it and the Cathedral boys’ choir sang. It was a momentous occasion!³

We hear that the disgraced ‘Reverend Professor’ has gone to Newcastle in the Colony of New South Wales and that he plans to study medicine!

At long last, after years of lobbying, Mitcham is to have a reticulated supply of water. Until now residents have had to rely on their own supplies (from tanks or wells) or pay to have it delivered by water-carts, such as those run by Mr John Prince. The supply is to consist of a well in Ellison’s Creek (a tributary of Brownhill Creek) with a reservoir and filter beds, then a 3-inch pipe to convey the water to a holding tank on the hill at the southern end of the Fullarton-road, from whence a pipe-track will supply the Village. It is also planned to build another pipe-track into Halifax-street in Adelaide, finishing up in front of St John’s Church.⁴

One of the chief instigators of the water scheme is Mr Charles Mallen who has just established a brewery on the banks of the Creek opposite the Torrens Arms Hotel at Lower Mitcham, for which good-quality water is needed in abundance. It is called the Waverley Brewery. John Prince’s old store was on the corner of this land facing

Bulls Creek-road, but it has now been demolished and a fine two-storey home built on the site for Mr Mallen.

7th April 1880

... Following the Easter Vestry last year the ladies of the congregation were “respectfully requested” to attend a meeting for the purpose of “taking steps to liquidate the debt of £116 18s 0d remaining on the organ and to raise funds to meet the balance of £161 13s 10d still owing for Church repairs”. I feel my friends must cringe when they see me approaching their door – begging-bowl in hand – asking for a subscription, or to attend one of the many fund-raising functions the ladies have organised. The latter, I must admit, have on the whole been very pleasant and enjoyable, and have included teas, concerts and various entertainments including recitals on our new organ. So far we have raised just over £205, with substantial donations of £10 or more from our usual generous friends Sir Thomas Elder, Hon. Joseph Fisher, Messr John Williams, Charles Mallen, John Prince, Charles Hardy, James Hill, Mrs Matilda Waite, Hon. William Morgan and Henry Strong Price. In fact the Price family were particularly generous, with subscriptions from not only Henry, but also from his wife and each of their three daughters, and even ten shillings from their servants. The bulk of the amount we have collected, £129, will go towards paying off the debt on the organ, with the other £76 being used on Church repairs.

Whilst the ladies have been busy liquidating the above debts, the Wardens and Vestrymen have been scratching their heads and wondering how they are to honour the commitment made to Mr Hocter for a minimum stipend of £400 per year. At the end of the first year of the arrangement with the new incumbent (which ended on the 30th September last) there was a deficiency in excess of £52 once the promised amount of £400 had been paid. A plea went out to all seat-holders to increase their pew rents immediately, but even so there is still an overdraft with the Bank in excess of £100. Apparently the Parsonage is also in need of repairs – again – and Mr James Manton has been requested to arrange an inspection and report on the state of the building. Will it never end!

On a lighter note, you will recall that dear Henry Taylor retired from the hotel trade about fifteen years ago, and that a subsequent owner renamed the premises ‘The Mitcham Hotel’ instead of ‘Brownhill Creek Inn’. Well, it has changed hands once again, and the current owner has converted the front portion to two storeys. It looks very handsome, and even has a charming Tea & Coffee Garden on the eastern side of the building which we frequent often [Fig. 3-3].⁵

Of course the Hotel is particularly well placed with the terminus of the horsetrams being virtually at its door! Since the tramway was opened in February last year there has been a most beneficial effect on the whole district with many new houses under construction along its entire route, especially along the northern side of the road between the Torrens Arms Hotel and Mitcham Institute. Thomas Newey’s coach stables opposite the Edinburgh Hotel were far too small to accommodate the trams, so a new depot had to be built on land diagonally opposite

the Institute. This comprises a large car-barn to house the two large and four small trams, stabling for up to twenty-eight horses, a fodder shed and several acres of agistment paddocks through which the track takes a broad sweep as it turns into Welbourne-street. There is also a slight bend in the road where it has been re-aligned for the entrance of the spur track into the car-barn.

The horsetram service has been financed by the Adelaide, Unley and Mitcham Tramway Company. Many of the Directors and those involved in its construction are members of the St Michael’s congregation. The trams have proved a boon to the local residents, being a much more comfortable means of conveyance than the omnibuses. They provide an hourly service between 6.15 a.m. and 11.30 p.m., with extra trams at peak times. They also bring out the Queen’s Mail which is delivered by the conductors to township post offices; also bundles of newspapers for various shops along the route. Apparently in some of the more sparsely populated areas people send their dogs to meet the early-morning tram and the conductor has to ensure that each dog is given the right newspaper to take home: it being “a well-known fact that these animals are unable to read”.⁶

After years of disputes over interference by other groups using the Institute Hall, the Mitcham School has moved to larger, purpose-built accommodation on the Bulls Creek-road at Lower Mitcham. This will mean a long walk for the children living in the Village but, as I understand it, the Education Department believes this site will be more accessible for all the young families building in that area as a result of the many subdivisions taking place in the vicinity of the new railway line. In February the District Council of Mitcham, which until now has rented a variety of premises, established its offices in the former Headmaster’s residence in the eastern wing of the Institute.

20th April 1881

... At yesterday’s Easter Vestry Mr James Bragg asked to be relieved of his duties “owing to the increasing infirmities of old age”. Bless the dear old man, he is nearly eighty and has served as verger for the past twenty-eight years. His first wife, Susannah, died about twenty years ago and in 1862 he married Jane Grainger (who is related to John Grainger). We shall miss his familiar figure walking around the Parish on his rounds collecting quarterly pew rents. Our new man, David Mundy, will have a much easier time of it as circulars have been sent to all seat-holders asking them to forward their pew rents to the Wardens direct in order to save the expense of collecting them.

It would seem that the old Parsonage will forever be a mill-stone around our necks! Last year Mr Charles Hardy was asked to make enquiries as to the position of the Title to the property and as to the possibility of selling or mortgaging it with a view to either building a new parsonage or making substantial additions to the present one. It was found that according to the Trust Deed of the property it was impossible either to sell or mortgage St Michael’s Parsonage. As a result, another subscription fund was opened in an effort to raise £500!

**Fig. 3-4**

*Josephite Convent,
Mitcham, c.1882.*

*The building was
demolished about 1926 and
the site is now the burial
ground for Josephite Sisters.
Alexander Tolmer's house is
on the left.*

*Detail from Capt. Sweet's
photo No.583.*

(Copy held in MLHC)

26th November 1881

... Just when it appeared that we were sinking ever deeper and deeper into debt over the cost of repairs to the Church and Parsonage, a 'grant-in-aid' was made in June by the attorneys of the S.P.G. through a 'Parsonage Building Fund'. Of course very strict conditions apply, one being that members of Vestry pledge themselves to insure, and keep insured, the building against fire for the sum of £800. Apparently St Michael's has been rather lax in adopting certain recommendations made by Synod back in 1871 regarding the matter of insurance. Wardens must also make an annual inspection of Parsonages. It has been duly recorded in the Vestry Minute Book that the Wardens should "have the power of inspection from time to time; that they should deduct a certain amount from the weekly offering to form a fund to meet the necessary expenditure in ordinary repairs; and that all extraordinary repairs must be reported to the Vestry to deal with as they think best".

Yesterday we had the privilege of attending the dedication by Bishop Short of St Barnabas' Theological College. It is an impressive two-storey building in the Tudor Gothic style, and is situated just across the road from the Cathedral at North Adelaide.

We are to have another religious house in Mitcham. You may remember that about ten years ago the Roman Catholics built a church-cum-school just down the road from St Michael's. Since then the Josephite Sisters have been living in various rented cottages in the Village. Now they are to have their own convent in which to reside, thanks to the generosity of Mr and Mrs Robert Barr Smith from 'Torrens Park'. Mother Mary MacKillop is a very dear friend of Mrs Barr Smith, who has done much to assist her financially in her work with the poor. The southern portion of the huge 'Torrens Park Estate' includes much of the hillside land and quarry sites above Mitcham, and it surrounds the two cemeteries on three sides. It is here that Mr Barr Smith has most generously made available a block of land (for a nominal fee of five shillings) adjoining the Mitcham General Cemetery where they are building the convent. It is right at the top

of Muggs Hill-road with a lovely view over the Village and Plains beyond [Fig. 3-4]. On Sunday, 10th July, following Mass at the Our Lady of Dolours Church, all the school children marched up the steep hill to the site of the convent for the laying of the foundation stone. It is good to know that we shall have this band of dedicated and caring women living permanently in our midst. They are much admired by all the Village folk and are known affectionately as 'Brown Joeys' from the colour of their habits...⁷

24th April 1882

... We had the pleasure yesterday of joining our Wesleyan Methodist brothers and sisters in celebrating the opening of their own chapel of worship on land adjoining the Mitcham Institute [Fig. 3-5]. From the time they laid the foundation stone on 19th January it has taken just three months (and £600) to build a substantial church, whereas it took us four years! Of course one cannot compare their rather dour bluestone 'hall' with the beauty and elegance of St Michael's with its mellow sandstone and magnificent tower.⁸

Fig. 3-5 *Former Wesleyan Methodist Church on Princes Road, built in 1882. Since the new A-shaped building, seen in Figure 7-3, was opened in 1963 the old one has been used as a hall.* (Gary Lee-Gaston, 1982)

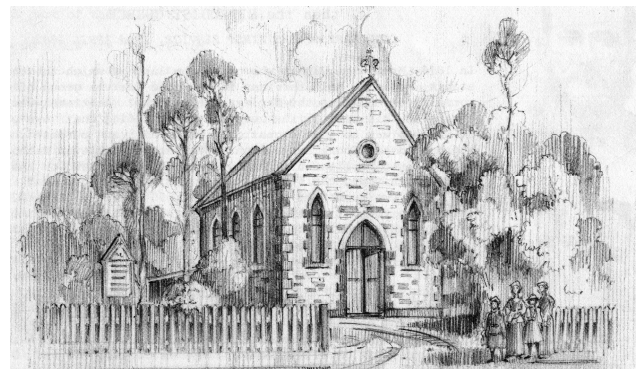




Fig. 3-6 Baptist Church, Albert Street, Mitcham, c.1880s. Further major additions and alterations were made in 1908 and 1973. (MLHC)

The Dissenters are going from strength to strength. You may also recall my telling you of a small Christian Chapel built in Albert-street back in 1860. Some months after Pastor Playford's death in September 1873 the members of that congregation decided to join the South Australian Baptist Association, and in August 1874 the building officially became known as the Mitcham Baptist Church [Fig. 3-6].

Our finances are still 'in-the-red' with a debt of £214 remaining on the Church, and over £36 upon the Parsonage. Yet in spite of this, Mr Hocter "expressed his concern" at the Easter Vestry that there was still a great need for a schoolroom, and Mr James Manton has been asked to supply plans and specifications for such a building and to superintend its erection. Really, this is too much! Where do these Vestrymen think the money is to come from? I am weary of collecting subscriptions...

9th September 1882

... Since my last letter there have been some rather radical changes in our Parish life: at present we are without the oversight of our incumbent minister. Reverend Francis Hocter called a Special Meeting of seat-holders on 8th July for the purpose of asking for six month's leave of absence as he was anxious to proceed to Great Britain on 'private business'. He intimated that he could only do that if he continued to receive his stipend! Obviously we could not afford to give him that and pay for another parson. After some discussion it was agreed to grant him nine months leave provided the congregation be satisfied during his absence with the services of Lay Readers, and monthly celebrations of the Holy Sacraments by the Bishop's Supply Chaplain.

Mr Hocter took his last service on 6th August and since then the Parish has been largely in the hands of Colonel Francis Downes [Fig. 3-7]. The Wardens approached him to undertake these duties, and he also agreed to be made a Lay Reader – a role he is fulfilling very well indeed – and to take charge of the Sunday School. He is assisted by our regular Lay Readers, Mr Robert Taylor and Mr George Bowyear.⁹

The Colonel is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich and saw active service in the Crimean War. He then became an instructor at the School of Gunnery in England before taking up a five-year appointment as Commandant of the South Australian Military Force in 1877. The formation of this permanent force coincided with a scare that the Russian navy would invade South Australia, and as a result a Military-road was planned and constructed on the eastern side of the coastal sand-dunes between Glenelg and The Semaphore. After a brief stint advising the New South Wales Government on all aspects of the organization and administration of its military forces, Col Downes has chosen to return to Adelaide. He is a very capable administrator and much respected by his subordinates.¹⁰

Colonel and Mrs Helen Downes, their daughter and four sons now live at 'Bloomfield', the large house adjoining the Church to the north [see Fig. 2-13]. For many years it was owned by the Thrupp family who at one stage offered it to St Michael's as a Parsonage.¹¹

4th April 1883

... On 12th March we received a letter of resignation from Mr Hocter saying that he had accepted an appointment in Liverpool. It now appears that he may have been in receipt of a salary from Liverpool at the same time as he was drawing his stipend as incumbent of St Michael's! The Wardens have been asked to write to him requesting a full statement and explanation of the circumstances. Meanwhile, at last night's Easter Vestry, Colonel Downes was elected Minister's Warden until the appointment of a new incumbent. Mr Robert Barr Smith recommended the Reverend Henry Pollitt, at present incumbent of Hindmarsh, as a replacement. However the general consensus of opinion was that Archdeacon Farr (at present en route back to the Colony) was in every way a most suitable candidate and that no further steps should be taken with regard to filling the vacancy until his arrival back from England later this month.

Fig. 3-7
Lieutenant-Colonel, later Major-General M.F. Downes, c.1876. (Farr album, courtesy Joan Clift)



I have from time to time mentioned the building of a railway line that is to connect us with the Victorian lines, and through them with the New South Wales system. It has been under construction since May 1879 and from an engineering point of view is by far the most difficult ever attempted here. The first section between Adelaide and Nairne (in the Adelaide Hills) was opened on 14th March. It was a very grand occasion and one of the most important events in our history. The Governor, Sir William Robinson, accompanied by nearly 250 gentlemen crowded into a special train which was drawn up at the Adelaide Railway Station at 11 o'clock. There could have been no better weather which favoured the gala day and we, like most of the population, were on the Mitcham Station to cheer and wave our flags. The buildings, fences and trees were decorated with bunting and greenery, and our Mitcham Brass Band played splendidly.¹²

THE INCUMBENCY OF GEORGE HENRY FARR (1st July 1883 to 31st December 1883)

It was not surprising that members of Vestry favoured Archdeacon George Farr as the new incumbent. Having spent nearly twenty-five years as the Headmaster of St Peter's College he was well known to Parish families, many of whom would have had sons at the school. But more importantly, seven Vestrymen had at some stage been members of the Council of Governors of the Church of England Collegiate School of St Peter during Farr's headmastership: William Bartley (1849–1857), Charles Burton Newenham (1849–1856), Nathaniel Oldham (1856–1862, then as Treasurer from 1862–1866), Dr William James Browne (1860–1861), Richard Hicks (1863–1865), The Hon. Arthur Blyth (1864–1877) and Colonel M. Francis Downes (1878–1881). Downes was keen to establish cadet corps in secondary schools, and within a week of his election as a Governor was approached by Farr to give advice on that issue, as well as the building of a gymnasium.¹³

Another early parishioner who had been associated with St Peter's College was John Grainger who donated £100 in 1847 towards the establishment of the school.¹⁴

Farr attended only two Vestry meetings at St Michael's: one on 11th September 1883 and one on 6th November. At the first it was noted that two, and maybe three, new Trustees would need to be appointed, and that Synod required a recommendation from St Michael's regarding the boundaries of the Parish. Immediately after appointing the new Trustees at the November Vestry, a letter from George Henry Farr was read in which he tendered his resignation saying that he found "the parochial duties of the Parish were too heavy in consequence of the distances he had to walk". One can only presume that Farr, upon setting foot back in the Colony, had been pressured into accepting the incumbency of St Michael's and that he had soon come to regret this hasty decision. Was this a way out of the dilemma?

Our Colonial Cousin had a few extra observations of her own to make.

14th August, 1883

... There is so much to tell you about our new incumbent Archdeacon George Henry Farr and his wife Mrs Julia Farr [Fig. 3-8]. He was instituted by the Bishop as our new incumbent on 3rd August, but had in fact been taking weekly services all through July. For a start the Archdeacon is small of stature and, at sixty-four years, a lot older than any minister we have had at St Michael's in the past. He was born in London in the same year as our gracious Queen and educated as a 'blue coat' boy at Christ's Hospital, London, before winning an exhibition to go up to Pembroke College, Cambridge, from where he took a B.A. in 1843. At his mother's wish he then read law with a conveyancer in London, but after her death the following year he returned to Cambridge to study theology (which was really what he would have preferred to have done in the first place). He was ordained deacon in 1844 and priest in 1845. For the next nine years he worked in various parishes in Cornwall where he was also Diocesan Inspector of Schools. This, no doubt, plus the fact that he had recently taken an M.A. from Cambridge, helped his cause when he applied to become Headmaster of St Peter's College. He had married Miss Julia Ord in 1846, and it was because of the likelihood of her developing consumption if they remained in Cornwall that he sought employment in a country with a dry climate. His qualifications obviously impressed the School Governors, who chose him from a list of twenty-eight candidates. However, the final appointment was subject to an interview with Bishop Short who was in England seeking advice on setting up a diocesan synod in Adelaide.

Following a very distinguished career spanning nearly twenty-five years as Headmaster, Farr retired in December 1878 and accepted the incumbency of the new parish of St Bede's at Semaphore. Knowing that this energetic man would need an added challenge, Bishop Short also appointed him Archdeacon of Mount Gambier and of the Western Mission Districts, which include the vast areas of Eyre and Yorke Peninsulas. During 1882–83 the Farris travelled to Italy and England, and whilst there he was awarded a Doctorate of Laws from Cambridge. In one of those strange quirks of fate, the subject of his thesis was the *Real Property Act* which, of course, had been drafted here at 'Torrens Park House' in the very heart of his new Parish by R.R. Torrens and Ulrich Hübbe. How strange that, after so many years, he should choose to interest himself in the subject of conveyancing – for which he had shown little aptitude as a young lawyer! As well as being a Headmaster, Archdeacon Farr has been a Canon of Adelaide since 1857. He also serves on the Board of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, and was Warden of the Senate of the University of Adelaide for two years prior to his recent visit Home.¹⁵

Like her husband, Mrs Julia Farr is a most hard-working and remarkable person with a striking personality and inquiring mind. I believe she speaks both French and German fluently and is very musical. When they arrived in the Colony in July 1854 they had only the one child, Eleanora, who was then about six years old. Six other babies – three boys and three girls – were born at the

Fig. 3-8
Archdeacon
George Henry Farr
and Mrs Julia Farr;
c.1880s.
(Farr album,
courtesy Joan Clift)



school over the next eleven years. Of course they are now mature young people ranging in ages from seventeen to thirty-five years.

In spite of having numerous babies to bring up, plus the added task of being a Headmaster's wife, Mrs Farr has devoted her life to helping the less fortunate in our community. Apparently she herself was orphaned at the age of sixteen years, and in 1860 she called together a committee of influential ladies under the patronage of Lady MacDonnell, the wife of the Governor, to found a home for destitute orphan girls. The Orphan Home was opened on 14th August 1860 in a large building formerly known as the German and British Hospital in Carrington-street, Adelaide. Fortuitously this happened to be Mrs Farr's birthday, and ever since the Annual Meeting has been held regularly each year on this date, or as near as possible. She still makes a point of attending all meetings of the Committee. The girls, under the care of a Matron, are provided with a good Christian home and are taught there by a governess. They also receive a thorough training in all branches of domestic work so that they can earn their own living, and at the age of fourteen are placed into service in respectable homes.¹⁶

As if The Orphan Home was not enough for this good lady to involve herself in, Mrs Farr was also instrumental in setting up a home for people with incurable illnesses who can no longer be cared for by their families. This Home for Incurables opened about five years ago in large grounds near Hon. Joseph Fisher's grand house 'Woodfield' at Fullarton. Indeed, our new incumbent's wife is a wonderful example of Christian womanhood...

7th November 1883

... Oh dear! Just when we thought Parish life was returning to normal, another blow. At the Vestry Meeting last night Archdeacon Farr handed in his letter of resignation to take effect from the end of the year. They have only been here a few months. Apparently he finds the large areas of the Parish too much to cope with and

has accepted the incumbency of a city church. Of course there was the usual panic checking on the whereabouts of the Trustees. The Hon. Richard Andrews (who is now a judge) indicated he wished to resign, and both Messrs John Williams and John Prince have left the Colony. They have been replaced by Mr James Page, Mr Gooch and Col Fiveash.

Mr John Prince has been a tower of strength for nearly thirty years, having served as a Trustee since 1870 and held the position of People's Warden these past three years. Way back in 1854 he purchased some forty acres of land at the point where the Brownhill Creek crosses Bulls Creek-road. His 'Parkfields' store was established to meet the needs of settlers at Lower Mitcham, and several years later the Torrens Arms Hotel was built on the opposite corner.

About the time the Institute was under construction a new road was opened between the Hotel and the Village. It ran diagonally through John Prince's property and parallel to the Brownhill Creek. Initially it was referred to as Finlayson's-road (because the Institute was built on part of Pastor William Finlayson's land) but now it is generally known as Prince's-road. Over the past three decades members of the Prince family have also worked as contractors quarrying stone and metal for roads, building bridges and delivering water to homes. During the great flood of May 1875 Mr Prince suffered serious loss in the destruction of a bridge then in course of construction on the road through the Village Green. It was completely washed away and he received no compensation from the District Council until it was rebuilt. The new road from the Village Green to the top of Muggs Hill-road was eventually opened a year later in May 1876. The keystone bridge is very handsome and is a boon to all as we no longer have to ford the creek [Fig. 3-9].¹⁷

Our new Trustee, Mr James Page, who has been active in the Parish for the past fifteen years, lives in Arthur Blyth's former home, 'The Hall'. Having purchased this

lovely home, set in six acres of land at Upper Mitcham, Mr Page painted it white so that it shines like marble in the sun, and renamed it ‘Whitehall’. The road along the eastern boundary of the estate is usually known as Page’s-road. James and his wife Susan have a large family, and their daughters (three of whom are married and live nearby) are regarded as the beauties of Mitcham. Clara is married to Harry Snell and they live in William Easter’s old home on the corner of Church-road and Page’s-road, and Alice and her husband Joseph Hornabrook (who is an architect) have built a new bluestone home next door in Page’s-road. The other sister, Helen, and her husband Lewis Hogg live in a fine home called ‘Haverhill’ at the top of Hogg’s-road [Fig. 3-10].¹⁸

One could write a book about James Page. Much of his early life was spent in France and Germany, and I am told that he is a superb linguist being fluent in many languages, including Russian! He has been Vice-Consul for Switzerland for the past four years, and also assists the Belgium and Russian consulates when required. He is an excellent accountant and has been a partner in the large wholesale and retail firm of Morgan & Co. for many years. Amongst his many attributes, James Page has a fine voice and was choir-master at his previous parish of Port Adelaide. He is treasurer of our Parsonage Building Fund and at the September Vestry quietly made the announcement that “the overdraft on the Parsonage Building Fund had been met by a donation”. It now transpires that he made the donation!

All of Adelaide was saddened to hear of the death of our first bishop, Augustus Short, who died in London a month ago aged eighty-one years. When one reflects on the vast changes that have occurred in our colonial society during the thirty-four years of his episcopate, you realise just how much he achieved in establishing the Church of England on such solid foundations, in spite of the antagonism of so many of the early pioneers against any

Fig. 3-9 Keystone bridge, Mitcham Reserve, drawn by Harry Snell in 1879. The small building, partly obscured by trees on the left, was a Bible Christian Chapel built in 1860 on part of Reverend Ralph Drummond’s land. It was later used by the Salvation Army before becoming a kiosk about 1912. In 1956 it was transferred to the City of Mitcham and subsequently demolished. The site is now part of the W.A. Norman Reserve, home of the Sturt Baseball Club. (MLHC)

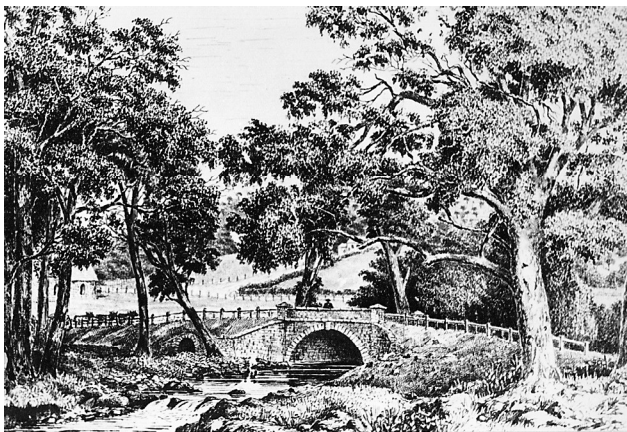


Fig. 3-10 ‘Haverhill’, c.1890s. The house, still standing on the corner of Hogg’s Road and Playford Road, is one of the oldest in Mitcham having been built for Benjamin Hogg in 1849. It was occupied by Lewis R. Hogg and his wife Helen (née Page) between 1879 and 1912, when it was sold to Leonard Playford. Current owners are Mr and Mrs H.B. Sellick. (MLHC)

form of aid to churches. He was a man of tremendous energy, always mindful of the need to administer to all his flock, whether in the towns or in far-flung areas of the Colony. Until the foundation of the Bishopric of Perth in 1857 his diocese included the whole of Western Australia, and from 1863 the Northern Territory!

Our new bishop, the Right Reverend George Wyndham Kennion, D.D., who arrived at the beginning of this year, is a young man in his mid-thirties. Shortly before leaving England he married Miss Henrietta Fergusson, a sister of our former Governor, Sir James Fergusson.¹⁹

Well, my dear Cousin, once we have resolved the issue of another new incumbent for St Michael’s, I will write you again...

THE INCUMBENCY OF ALFRED SELLS (1884–1888)

South Australia had been experiencing an era of “abounding prosperity and rapid expansion” until the mid-1880s when it gradually slid into a period of deep economic depression which was to last for many years. The position was further aggravated by severe drought in the Far North of the Colony that decimated the pastoral industry leaving many primary producers in hopeless debt, and forcing some banks to close. Wool, on which much of the economy was based, dropped in price from twelve pence per pound in 1884 to seven pence in 1893. Many young men left the Colony to seek employment elsewhere. On the Parish level, the guaranteed stipend of £350 per year received by Hocter in 1879 had fallen to £200 a decade later. At the Easter Vestry in 1885 the Wardens had shown “great satisfaction” at the Parish being “once more out of debt”. From there on it was a down-hill slide: the organist’s salary fell from £40 to £20 between 1886 and 1888, and the vergers’ from £26 to £18.

Farr’s replacement at Mitcham was his old friend Reverend Alfred Sells, M.A., a man only three years younger than Farr. During Sells incumbency affairs were

said to have “progressed quietly and harmoniously”, and when he retired on the 30th June 1888 he was described as being a man of “gentle demeanour and kindness of heart” who had “won a place in the affections of many”.

Sells was also an artist. In 1978 twelve of his paintings were shown at a mixed exhibition at the Bugle Galleries, Mount Barker. In his press review of the event, the art critic for the *Advertiser* and *Sunday Mail*, David Dolan, had this to say:

Sells was strictly an amateur artist, and little was known about him until recently... There is no evidence that he ever exhibited his work in his lifetime, or that many people knew of his pastime. But since his work came to light in London in 1969, there have been at least four Sells exhibitions in Adelaide and one in Sydney.

*The Art Gallery of SA owns six of his watercolours; and the State Archives has a sketchbook with his paintings of SA, Tasmania, Ceylon, England and Europe, covering the years 1898–1902.*²⁰

Information regarding his family is hard to verify. It would appear that Alfred Sells was probably a widower when he came to South Australia and that his wife, Maria, may have died in childbirth. It is known that in 1902 Alfred lived in Bournemouth with his eldest daughter, Frances, who had married a Mr Crallon. Her date of birth is unknown. There were at least five other children who were all born whilst the family was living in Southampton: Elizabeth (1854), Harriet (1856), Alfred (1857), Edward (1862) and George (1863). Three of them died in South Australia, probably from TB: George when he was twenty, and Harriet and Alfred when they were both thirty years old. Heartbroken after the death of his third child, Sells returned to England at the end of 1888. He seems to have remarried, for there is a note in the *St Michael's Parish Magazine* dated October 1890 saying he had retired to a “pretty home in Devonshire”, and that it was “very characteristic to hear from Mrs Sells, that at the time of writing, her husband had gone off sketching in the hills.” There are also *cartes-de-visite* (taken c.1890s in England) of both Alfred and a ‘Mrs Sells’, plus a delightful informal photograph of them both (Fig. 3-11). These, together with photographs of four of the Sells children taken in Adelaide c.1887, are contained in an album once owned by Archdeacon and Mrs Julia Farr who were family friends.

As noted above, Sells travelled extensively in Europe during his retirement and also made a trip back to Australia. He appears to have had ‘private means’ for when he died in 1908 his estate was valued at nearly £stg17,284.²¹

* * *

20th April 1884

My dearest Cousin,

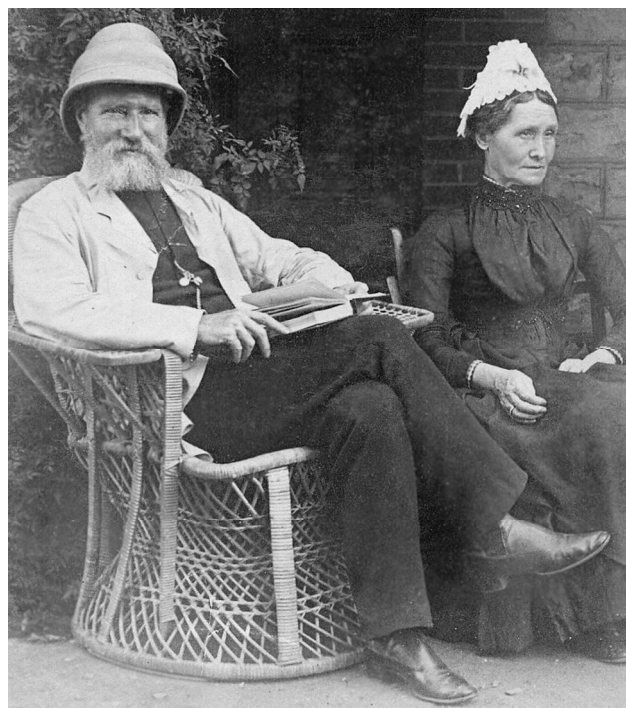
As promised, I now write you concerning our new minister who was inducted on 20th March. His name is Alfred Sells and, like Archdeacon Farr, he is a man of ‘mature years’ (about sixty-two I believe). He distinguished himself in the study of classics at Clare College, Cambridge, graduating with a B.A. in 1844 and

an M.A. in 1847 – the same year that he was ordained a priest at Salisbury. He was an assistant master at Marlborough College from 1845 to 1849, then conducted a private school in Southampton between 1850 and 1872.

I understand that his wife, Maria, died some years ago and Mr Sells decided to bring his children to South Australia to join other members of the Sells family already living here. His younger brother William, a pastoralist in the Flinders and Gawler Ranges, is married to the Hon. Arthur Blyth’s daughter, Frances. Reverend Alfred Sells and his children sailed from Plymouth Ho in 1872 and reached Port Adelaide after a three-month journey via Indonesia. Evidently there was no Living available in Adelaide when he arrived, so he went north to join his brother. In March 1877 he was appointed as the Bishop’s Missionary Chaplain, and in May that year became incumbent of Holy Trinity Church at Lyndoch in the Barossa Valley (Reverend Professor Henry Read’s former parish). The Living includes the Church of St Peter at Williamstown, also Mr Joseph Gilbert’s private chapel of St Thomas on his large property known as ‘Pewsey Vale’.

Tragically, Mr Sells’ twenty-year-old son, George Whitehead Sells, died at Lyndoch last October and is buried in the Parish Cemetery there. I think he suffered from consumption, which may be why the family came to the Colony in the first place. The eldest son, also named Alfred, completed his B.A. at St John’s College, Cambridge, in 1878 before coming out to join his father. He was ordained deacon in Adelaide in 1881, and priest just before last Christmas. He is now assistant curate at Glenelg and Brighton. It is rather confusing having two Reverend Alfred Sells in the Colony, so we refer to ours as Sells Senior!

Fig. 3-11 Reverend Alfred Sells and Mrs Sells, c.1900.
(Farr album, courtesy Joan Clift)



Miss Sells is taking a lively interest in the Sunday School. We often see father and daughter walking up the Brownhill Creek Valley carrying their sketch-pads and paints. I have seen some of his watercolours and they are very good indeed. He seems to find solace from his sorrow in painting.

31st October 1885

... We were reflecting recently on all the changes that have taken place within the Village over the past forty years. The nostalgia was precipitated by the news of Mr William Bartley's death last month at the grand old age of eighty-six. Ill health eventually made him retire six years ago after spending the previous twenty years as Senior Solicitor in the Lands Titles Office. What a tower of strength that man was in establishing the Church of England here on a strong legal footing, particularly during Bishop Short's early episcopate. Indeed, it was William who read Her Majesty's Letters Patent (a most lengthy document constituting Adelaide as the Bishop's See) when His Lordship arrived and was installed on 30th December 1847. In those days the Bishop and Mrs Short frequently stayed with the Bartleys at 'Delamere' whilst their own home, 'Claremont' at Burnside, was being built. Not only were the two men firm friends, but William was also the Bishop's Registrar, Counsel and Legal Advisor. Many were the times when he made little or no charge for his legal work.²²

William was naturally of a modest and retiring nature, and really did not relish the cut and thrust of the Courts of Justice. There was a famous occasion back in 1855 when he had to appear before Judge Cooper in the Supreme Court as Counsel for His Lordship who was trying to establish a claim for a 'Church Acre' in Victoria Square. Much to Bishop Short's chagrin the case was lost, and afterwards he told Charles Cooper just what he thought of him. He then stormed home, collected his wife Millicent and they both went to an 'At Home' at Charles and Emily Cooper's house! The story came from William's second wife, Sarah, who is Charles Cooper's sister.²³

St Michael's lost another of its founders earlier in the year. Our very dear friend Mr Henry Taylor died in March at the age of seventy years. He will be a great loss to our little community, having been involved in so many organisations.

Young Francis Warhurst, the organist, is to marry Miss Theresa Allison (daughter of our local chemist and apothecary) in December.

17th October 1887

... Today is the 35th anniversary of the opening of our dear Church. The organ has been moved and repaired, and the ambience of the interior greatly improved by several gifts from Mr Sells. Last year he donated some brasswork, and more recently a new altar cloth and reredos which he has carved in memory of his younger daughter, Harriet. Sadly, she died last December of consumption (I believe). This was very generous of him considering the parlous state of the economy, for we seem to be sinking further and further into a depression. The verger has been told that after the current quarter the

Wardens will only be able to pay him at the rate of £20 per annum for the work instead of £26. Francis Warhurst resigned his position as organist, and Miss Playford has consented to play for six or nine months as a temporary arrangement. However, the salary has been dropped from £40 to £30. The one bright spot in all this is that Mr Charles Hardy has been nominated to fill the vacancy of Minister's Warden. With his astute legal mind and business acumen he, if anyone, should be able to steer us on a safe course.

Having persevered for years with the 8 a.m. fortnightly Holy Communion services, I think Mr Sells will give up the struggle this summer. Only two or three people attend regularly, and even those fail to materialize if the weather is at all inclement. More often than not his remarks in the Vestry Record Book read: "8 a.m. No congregation. Wet!"

The other piece of news from the Village concerns our new Premier: he is none other than the Hon. Thomas Playford (son of Pastor Thomas), who formed a Ministry in June. He follows in the footsteps of other Mitcham men, namely Robert Torrens, Arthur Blyth and William Morgan – all three of whom were, at one time or another, seat-holders at St Michael's!

19th June 1888

... Mr Sells is returning to live in England. The poor man has had more than his share of sorrow since arriving on our shores. His son, Reverend Alfred Sells (Junior) died on New Year's Eve and has been buried in the St Jude's Parish Cemetery near the grave of his sister Harriet. They were both thirty years of age. Mr Sells made the formal announcement of his retirement at the Easter Vestry. Since then the Wardens have been in communication with the Reverend Frederick Samwell at Mount Barker who has accepted the Mitcham incumbency as from the 30th of this month.

With the depression deepening each month, Mr Samwell is well aware that the past four years have been very bad years and he is content to accept a guaranteed stipend of only £200. There has been, however, a most generous offer from Mr Henry Strong Price who will guarantee a payment of £50 a year towards the incumbent's stipend in lieu of the £12 seat rent he has hitherto paid. This is a wonderful gesture, particularly in light of the plight of the pastoral industry from whence his wealth emanates. The verger is now receiving a mere £18, and Miss Playford's salary as organist has dropped a further £10 to just £20 per year. She is supplementing her income by giving piano lessons, and recently arranged a concert that raised nearly £6 towards further work which is needed on the organ.

We have received news that Henry Read died in Brisbane of heart disease on 24th March. After his hasty departure from Adelaide in 1878 he went to Newcastle in New South Wales, and the next year graduated as a Doctor of Medicine from the Medical College of the Pacific, University College, San Francisco. Then, according to the obituary, in 1883 he became a Licentiate, and also a Licentiate in Midwifery, of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, and of the Faculty of

Physicians, Glasgow. He registered those qualifications in Victoria where he lived for about two years before moving to Queensland. We knew that he had pursued some medical studies as a young man whilst still a student at Cambridge, and admit – grudgingly – that he has accomplished quite a lot, and that it is no mean feat to have achieved those particular qualifications at his age.²⁴

Once Mr Samwell has settled in, I will write you again and give a first-hand report on our new man. He comes highly recommended by the Barr Smiths, who attend his services at Christ Church, Mount Barker, when they are in residence at ‘Auchendarroch’ during the summer months. They all like him and say we shall find him “a most agreeable neighbour”.²⁵

THE INCUMBENCY OF FREDERICK WILLIAM SAMWELL (1888–1893)

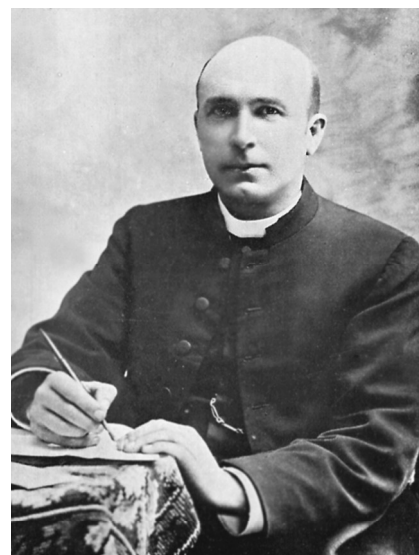
After five years of quiet slumber during the incumbency of the two aging ministers, Farr and Sells, the Parish of Mitcham was abruptly awakened by the arrival of an energetic and dynamic young man by the name of Frederick Samwell [Fig. 3-12]. He soon made his influence felt, not only in Church matters, but also in “all extra-parochial affairs through which he might come into helpful contact with his fellow-men”. Much of his success derived from his power of inspiring others with his own individual enthusiasm:

*Samwell used methods that were proving popular in similar parishes in England. These included diligent house-to-house visiting, a monthly parish magazine, a range of clubs and organizations, dignified but ‘hearty’ services, with good preaching, and the building of small mission churches to reach people who lived at a distance from the parish church.*²⁶

This “innovative and distinctive progressive character” of Samwell’s work in the fields of education, outreach and mission, and the introduction of parish organisations were evident during his five-year incumbency at Mitcham. Within three years of leaving he had been appointed a Canon and was “a leading spirit in all matters of Diocesan moment”: Synodal Reporter, member of Standing Committee, member of the Diocesan Board of Education, Editor of the Year Book, Governor of Pulteney Grammar School and a representative to the General Synod of Australia and Tasmania. He was also Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons in South Australia.²⁷

His greatest achievements at Mitcham were the enthusiasm he instilled into the congregation (particularly the young people) and the founding of the St Michael’s Day School. In March 1890, less than two years after his arrival, the number of communicants at St Michael’s had risen from 30 to 62, and the acts of communion from 329 to 1015; baptisms increased from 15 to 25 and 13 persons were confirmed (none for the preceding two years). His report to the Easter Vestry in April 1892 noted that during the past year 221 services had been held, of which only 57 were celebrations at St Michael’s. The others, presumably,

Fig. 3-12
Reverend
Frederick William
Samwell.
(MPA)



were services held at the Home for Incurables at Fullarton, and at various houses and halls in his Hills Mission District. The latter encompassed Belair, Blackwood, Eden Hills and Coromandel Valley (where St John’s Church had had to close its doors for three years because the Cure was vacant). He was also Priest-in-Charge of Kangaroo Island!

Parish life in Mitcham, as noted by our Colonial Cousin, was about to undergo a transformation.

* * *

17th July 1888

My dear Cousin Elizabeth,

As promised, I can now tell you at first-hand of our new incumbent. Although it is still mid-winter here, it feels as though a breath of spring has come to the Parish in the form of Frederick William Samwell. He is quite a young man, only twenty-seven years old, and is betrothed to Miss Marion Richardson of Mount Barker.

Mr Samwell was born in Leicester, and at the age of twenty-one entered St Augustine’s College, Canterbury, where he gained a First Class in the Theological Examination for Candidates for Holy Orders. Soon afterwards he sailed for Adelaide aboard the *Orient* and was licensed by Bishop Kennion on 31st May 1885 as assistant curate in the Parish of Strathalbyn and the Lakes Mission. On 24th June 1886 he was ordained priest and received the appointment of incumbent of Mount Barker, Echunga and Hahndorf. His induction here at Mitcham took place two weeks ago on the 3rd of July.

What manner of man is he? Well, he is brimming over with vitality, has infectious high spirits and an unrestrained spontaneous laugh. His presence in any company or assembly is an inspiring element. Although not exactly what one would describe as a ‘pulpit orator’, his chief strength as a preacher lies in his fearless courage and in the unflinching exercise of his duty as the deliverer of God’s message. At times he is impressively eloquent, occasionally poetic, and always polished in his choice of language. He is felicitous in his quotations, always logical in his argument and picturesque in his descriptions, and often strikingly original in his similes and illustrations...²⁸

16th November 1888

... We now have a young bride living in the Parsonage. The wedding of Reverend Frederick Samwell and Miss Marion Richardson took place in Christ Church, Mount Barker, on 2nd October. She is a delightful young woman of twenty-two years, and will make an admirable parson's wife.

Mr Charles Hardy has resigned as Minister's Warden as he will be temporarily leaving Mitcham. Before going he has promised to obtain estimates of legal and other expenses involved in sorting out various problems associated with the Trusts of the Church. Apparently many of the appointments made in the past to fill vacancies caused by the death or resignation of Trustees had no legal value, inasmuch as they had not been endorsed on the original Deed and a Transfer obtained. At present only two of our five appointed Trustees are still alive: Sir Arthur Blyth (he was knighted in 1877 and is in England serving as our Agent-General) and Mr John Prince (now living in New South Wales). As neither is resident in the Colony they are, by the express terms of the Trust Deed, disqualified from acting! In consequence, five new Trustees are to be appointed at the next Easter Vestry, and the following gentlemen have agreed to stand: Major-General Francis Downes, Messrs Robert Taylor, Robert Thorpe, Henry Morgan Hawkes and George Riddoch.

30th April 1889

... Since his arrival less than a year ago Mr Samwell has breathed fresh life into the Parish. In an amazing turn-around the Church's income has increased from £258 last year to over £448 this financial year, and the Building Fund for a Day School is progressing well.

Two years ago a Diocesan Board of Education was set up to establish and assist Church schools and Mr Samwell is very keen to take advantage of this fact. As we have, as yet, no suitable building in which to operate a proper school, he has already made a beginning by renting a cottage in Welbourne-street for twelve months. He opened the St Michael's Day School there in March with just a handful of students, but has every hope that by the end of the year it will show very satisfactory results for the work done, both in the departments of religious and secular knowledge.

The cottage in Welbourne-street is a first step to our having an habitation in the centre of the Village, and already it has been used frequently for meetings. Plans are also underway to begin a Society of Young Men for recreation and instruction, which Mr Samwell hopes will be started before the winter. Another of his innovations has been to have the sidesmen welcome visitors to the Church instead of leaving it to the verger to do so. The Parish now has a typewriter which is put to good use in producing the *St Michael's Parish Magazine*, Vestry Reports and correspondence.

In Mr Samwell's report last week to the Easter Vestry it was noted that there had been a considerable increase in the number of children attending Sunday School, there now being 14 teachers and 172 scholars! A monthly service for children, which he instigated, seems to be

much appreciated, whilst the proposal to educate a native boy for a Christian Teacher in the Melanesian Mission is one of the most encouraging features of the year's work. The annual cost of £10 is to be subscribed by the Sunday School children themselves.

Mr Samwell has a fine singing voice and has been rather disappointed with the efforts made by our choir. In his report he noted, rather sadly, that the "Divine Art of Music does not seem to have been bestowed upon Mitcham in any very lavish manner", and what he thought would have been his "easiest task has proved the most difficult". He feels the choir needs much strengthening in numbers, but is quick to show appreciation to present members for the interest they have taken, and for their regular attendances at the services and practices...

6th December 1889

... We have been saddened by the passing of William Easter. It is hard to reconcile the fact that it was forty years ago when he called the first meeting to found a church in Mitcham. Although he left the district soon afterwards, he returned within about ten years to live on the Unley-road where he died on 6th July at the age of seventy-five years. He was a most zealous worker in everything, including two years as People's Warden in the mid-1870s. He served as Chairman of the District Council of Mitcham for the five years prior to the opening of the Mitcham Institute, which was said to be "practically the outcome of his energy".

Talking of the Institute reminds me to tell you that we now have a Police Station in the Village. It was built on eighty feet of land purchased from the Institute, which it adjoins on the west. We are a very peaceful, law-abiding community, but never-the-less it is comforting to know that we now have a resident Sergeant.²⁹

In August Mr Samwell was relieved of some of his duties in the Hills. After three years as a vacant Cure, St John's at Coromandel Valley has been re-opened with the Reverend Charles Beaumont as the new incumbent. He has also taken responsibility for Meadows, Clarendon, Wellington and Murray Bridge, but Mr Samwell retains the Mission District on Kangaroo Island.³⁰ It is good that he has a little more time at home, because he is now a family man: on 27th September his wife, Marion, was safely delivered of their first child, Owen Augustine. We are all delighted with the new arrival as there has not been a baby in the Parsonage since the Hocter family arrived eleven years ago.

Friday, 11th April 1890

Dear Cousin Elizabeth,

Yesterday we had the privilege of being presented to His Excellency the Rt Hon. the Earl of Kintore, Governor of South Australia! The occasion was the laying of the foundation stone of our St Michael's Day School by his wife the Countess of Kintore. It was a most impressive ceremony with dignitaries from the Church and District Council present. Their Excellencies have been in the Colony for exactly one year, but this was the first time they had paid an official visit to Mitcham, so of course it was an event of some importance in the lives of the local

community, most of whom turned out to welcome the visitors and wave flags.³¹

The architect for the Day School, Mr David Garlick, is the same one who designed the Mitcham Institute. Financial constraints mean that only the main hall will be built at this time, and as the need for more accommodation arises the smaller rooms on either side can be added. There are already seventy children on the St Michael's Day School roll, and from the Inspector's Report very satisfactory progress has been made in spite of the cramped conditions in the cottage in Welbourne-st.

Mr Samwell is, as I have said before, a very forceful and energetic young man, always full of new ideas to spread God's word. He feels that owing to the position of our Church, placed as it is on the hillside at some distance from the centre of population around Lower Mitcham, that it is futile to expect the non-committed to make the effort to walk that far. In order to get hold of these people he asked the Easter Vestry to consider the desirability of utilising the new Schoolroom (when it is finished) for occasional Sunday evening services. He envisages these as being of what is generally known as a "Mission" character, consisting of simple prayers, the reading of God's Word, singing and an address. He feels that by this means we might gradually draw in a number of folk who would not be attracted by (or who could not understand) our Prayer Book. To use his own words: "Of that Liturgy no one could have a higher estimation than I, and I recognise that 'the Prayer Book was made for man, and not man for the Prayer Book', and that there are classes of people it cannot at first touch." The question was fully discussed at the meeting, and while it was left to the incumbent to act as he thought fit, it was generally considered that the service of Evening Prayer should always be held on Sundays in St Michael's Church as usual, and that when the incumbent was engaged in conducting a service in the Schoolroom at the same hour, the help of a Lay Reader should be utilised for the Church service.

At the Vestry a letter was read from the Secretary of Church Office informing us that the sum of £250 had been received as a bequest under the will of the late Henry Strong Price. It is to be held in Trust by Synod and invested, with the income paid to the incumbent of St Michael's. However, should his stipend exceed £300 p.a. the income is to be paid towards the augmentation of the stipends of the Mission Clergy of the Church of England.

A letter from Mr Samwell was also read reminding the Vestry that the term of two years for which he consented to hold the incumbency would expire on 30th June. When he accepted the position the Parish could only guarantee a stipend of £200 (which was less than he was receiving at Mount Barker!) and although he has received considerably more than the minimum, he felt that the clergyman in charge of a parish like this should receive a fixed amount. He could not see why the removal of a seat-holder from Mitcham should seriously jeopardise his stipend. As an example he noted that while the Price bequest of £250 was most generous, the amount of interest payable on it (£12 10s 0d p.a.) is only one-fourth of the £50 donations Henry had been in the habit of

giving over the past two years in lieu of the set pew rent of £12. He has suggested that a general Stipend Fund be set up to supplement the amount derivable from pew rents and endowments, and that next year he be guaranteed a minimum of £250. Whilst the Vestry was anxious to retain the services of Mr Samwell, the Wardens felt that no actual guarantee could be entered into, on account of the personal liability that might devolve upon those guaranteeing. However, they unanimously agreed to endeavour to raise a Stipend Fund, and those present there and then promised to pay £27 to this Fund before 31st March 1891.

We lost another of our seat-holders recently with the death of Captain Alexander Tolmer on 9th March at the age of seventy-four years. A Military Funeral was held at St Michael's before the huge procession wound its way up the hill to our Cemetery. For the past twelve years Capt. Tolmer and his wife Jeannie have been living in their delightful home at the top of Muggs Hill-road which is immediately opposite the Cemetery [see Fig. 3-4]. In his earlier years he was credited with 'saving the Colony from financial ruin' when, as an Inspector of Police, he organised police-trooper escorts to ensure that hard-won gold from the Victorian diggings was delivered safely into the Adelaide vaults instead of being stolen en route by gangs of bushrangers...

Monday, 27th October 1890

... In my last letter some six months ago, I told you of the excitement surrounding the Governor's visit for the laying of the foundation stone of our St Michael's Day School Hall on 10th April. Happily, it was speedily completed and the opening took place on Wednesday, 30th July at 8 o'clock in the evening [Fig. 3-13]. A large audience, a splendid concert and a brilliantly lit new room all combined to give *eclat* to the occasion. The contributions of Mr Wybert Reeve (of the Theatre Royal) proved a great treat and he was vociferously encored for each of his elocutionary recitals.³²

Following the opening of the Hall, the Sunday School children had the honour of using it first on the following Sunday, and the Day School moved in the next day. A Sunday School at Lower Mitcham has been in existence for nearly seven years, and the Misses Thornber's work in establishing it has been of the greatest good. But now, having amalgamated with the Upper Mitcham Sunday School in the new building, the Lower Mitcham teachers have loyally and cheerfully done their part in promoting the general good.³³

A proscenium for the stage has been completed since the opening. This will be a great acquisition at performances and, as the acoustic properties of the Hall are exceptionally good, it is very suitable for entertainments. The great want now is for a piano, and then we shall be completely furnished.

I nearly forgot to tell you about the bell which has been purchased for St Michael's Day School. In the *St Michael's Parish Magazine* Mr Samwell recounted the story of how, about forty years ago, this same bell rang out from the old schoolhouse on the Village Green. It was the recognised standard timekeeper for the whole Village, and at 9, 12, 2

OPENING OF ST. MICHAEL'S
HALL & SCHOOLROOM,
 MITCHAM.
Wednesday, July 30th, 1890.

The Committee have much pleasure
 in announcing that they have
 arranged with the
Adelaide Cathedral Choir
 Renowned as the best Choir in Australasia, to give a
GRAND CONCERT,
 And an additional great attraction will be the rendering
 of several Elocutionary RECITALS by
Mr. Wybert Reeve,
 Who has generously promised his talented services on
 the above occasion.

THE MINISTER of EDUCATION
 (The HON. J. H. GORDON, M.L.C.) will declare the
 Building open.

For full information see Programmes to be issued shortly.

DOORS OPEN at 7.30, to COMMENCE at 8. ADMISSION, Reserved
 Seats (numbered), Three Shillings, Second Seats, Two Shillings,
 Back Seats, One Shilling. (Ticket-holders will be admitted at 7.15.)
 A Plan of the Hall may be seen at MRS. TAYLOR'S STORE.
 B. Brookman, Printer, Pirie Street, Adelaide.

*Fig. 3-13 Advertisement for the opening of the St Michael's Day School and Hall on 30th July 1890. The architectural plans are shown in Chapter 14.
 (St Michael's Parish Magazine, July 1890)*

and 4 o'clock each day the *methodical dominie* Mr Mugg would command some well-behaved scholar to perform 'the duty'. A few minutes before noon each day, a scholar would be posted outside to listen for the report of the gun in Adelaide, which used to proclaim that the sun was at its meridian. Rushing in excitedly with the news – "The gun, sir! The gun!" – the order "Ring the bell!" was invariably given, and the bell was rung and the life of the Village proceeded in due order. Upon one special occasion, says an old resident, the bell was rung at 11 o'clock, and the workmen unquestioningly proceeded home, and were indignant to find their midday meal unprepared! About twenty years ago the Mitcham School moved to the Institute and the bell went there also, where it has since remained, though it has been mute. Now, again, its joyful sound is heard, and the children and grandchildren of former scholars are bidden by its voice to learn that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom".³⁴

On 27th September we attended the laying of the corner stone of the Cathedral nave and towers. It was a most impressive ceremony and St Michael's was well represented. I understand that Sir Thomas Elder made a most generous donation which has enabled the new work to proceed.

The Annual Friendly Societies' Service was held yesterday and St Michael's was crowded with men. Messrs Hans Bertram and E.J. Warhurst were the organists and succeeded in bringing out the great merits of our instrument, which for its full rich tones and sweetness is not surpassed in the Colony. The Lord Bishop was the preacher. It is noteworthy that as St Michael's was the first church in the Colony in which a Friendly Society Service was held, so it is the only one in which the Service is continued annually. It is hoped that for many years to come the doors will be thrown open for such a gathering as that which thronged the building yesterday.³⁵

Another recent event of some significance was the charming Flower Service held on 12th October at 3 o'clock in the Church. The floral offerings were finer than on any previous occasion, and as the weather kept cool, they were delivered at the Home for Incurables in splendid condition, and brought much pleasure to the inmates. A special Order of Service was drawn up by Mr Samwell for the occasion, and in its printed form is to be utilised by the North Adelaide, Norwood, Gawler, Unley and other churches. The idea of having a specially-compiled service was a success, the singing being hearty, and the *Flower Carol* proving a great favourite...³⁶

4th February 1891

... General Downes, who now serves on an inter-colonial committee of Military Commandants, has been away these past three months on most important work. He is to engage with the leading authorities of the Eastern Colonies with a view of reporting on the Defences of the Continent. This will necessitate the inspection of the ports from King George's Sound to Port Darwin.

Since its opening last July the Hall has been used for numerous social events besides its main function as a Day School. Mr Samwell is planning to hold a 'Mission Service' there tomorrow, and these will be held weekly on Thursday evenings. He was pleased to accede to a request to hold these gatherings and trusts that all people in the neighbourhood will avail themselves of them. These will replace the Evensong and Bible Class previously held on Thursday nights in the Church.

On the proposition of the Bishop, Mr Samwell has been elected Honorary Secretary of the Diocesan Board of Education.³⁷

The Second Annual Gathering of teachers of the Church of England Sunday School Union was held at Mitcham on 13th December. St Michael's has not been associated in the past with Diocesan societies to any extent. In these days, when Unions are very popular, there is no need to dilate upon the value of organised labour, and the mere sight of some 150 Christians, for the most part personally unknown to each other, and yet actively engaged in the same glorious work, is an inspiration to more earnest effort. The Lord Bishop was the preacher. We have been told by a prominent worker in the cause that it was the most enjoyable gathering ever held under the auspices of the Union.³⁸

There have been reports that the Gas Company is contemplating laying a main on to the Fullarton-road. The Wardens have been authorised to obtain all the

information they can, and if there is a reasonable prospect of the main being extended, they are to call a Special Vestry to discuss the matter. Mr Robert Barr Smith is on the Board of the Gas Company, so hopefully he will put in a good word for the citizens of Upper Mitcham. It is also rumoured that gas-lamps are to be placed at the tram terminus in Albert-street and at the Post Office in Welbourne-street. Let us hope it is true! Perhaps the road leading to the Church will soon receive attention. It is a positive disgrace to a civilized community. If members of the District Council were driven up and down it several times in a spring cart at a fair pace, it would soon be mended.³⁹

13th December 1891

... You asked whether our Mitcham cricketers were keeping up the ancient traditions of their namesakes in Surrey. I can assure you that they are, as well as their reputation for being one of the best clubs off the Adelaide Oval. Last season the First Eleven batting prize was won by our parishioner, Mr Alfred Wilkinson, and the bowling prize by our Mitcham captain – none other than Frederick Samwell! A photograph of the winning team is enclosed [Fig. 3-14]. Mr Robert Barr Smith has graciously made available an area in the NE corner of the 'Torrens Park Estate' as the home of the Mitcham Cricket Club. An asphalt pitch has been laid and a row of gum trees planted along the eastern boundary to provide shade in the future.⁴⁰

The other focus of local attention has been the Mitcham Institute. Over the past few years Mr Samwell has played a leading role in Institute affairs: he served for two years as President of the Mitcham Institute Association, is currently a Representative to the Union and President of the Literary Society. At his instigation ladies have been admitted as Associates of the Literary Society, which has led to a great revival of interest on the part of the gentlemen! They are also going to try a Model Parliament. Once our handsome Day School Hall had been completed, our incumbent turned his considerable energies to improving the appearance of the Institute, which, by comparison, was looking decidedly shabby. Within weeks the twenty-year-old building was surrounded with scaffolding poles and the exterior was soon transformed from a disgrace to a credit. Inside a new stage was built.⁴¹

Mr Samwell is now trying to organise a good Drum and Fife Band for the youths of the Parish, but there appears to be great difficulty in obtaining a competent instructor. Ideally, he would like to start a Brass Band, but the great expense attaching to the purchase of instruments stands in the way. However, he feels that if a few of our wealthy people would like to come forward with a portion of the cost, there would be no difficulty about providing the bandmaster and the players.

Talking of wealthy parishioners, we have received news that Sir Arthur Blyth is dead [Fig. 3-15]. In

Fig. 3-14 Mitcham Cricket Club First Eleven, 1888. The captain, Reverend Frederick Samwell (seated centre right holding the ball), won the prize for best bowler of the season. The oval was in the grounds of the 'Torrens Park Estate' owned by Robert Barr Smith. Homes in the area between Fife Avenue, Balogie Road and Lochness Avenue now occupy the site. A row of gum trees in Balogie Road mark the eastern boundary of the ground. (MPA)



yesterday's *Observer* there was a lengthy obituary outlining his prestigious career as a businessman. He was also a key figure in the Colony's political sphere serving in many capacities: Premier three times, Commissioner of Public Works, Treasurer, Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, and Chief Secretary. Since early 1877 he had been working in London as Agent-General for South Australia. He died at his home at Eastbourne, Sussex, on 7th December.

Sir Arthur, whose beautiful home 'The Hall' [see Fig. 2-3] was built at the same time as St Michael's, was present at the very first Vestry held in 1853. In spite of the fact that he was bitterly opposed to the concept of State Aid for religious purposes, he had always been a really religious man, a most devout member of the Church of England and a generous subscriber to St Michael's. Over the years he served as People's Warden, Trustee, Synodman and was on the Building Committee through all the protracted negotiations leading to the construction of the south nave. Sir Arthur was the second chairman of the District Council of Mitcham and was involved in numerous local affairs. He was also interested in education and served on the Council of the University of Adelaide, and as a Governor of St Peter's College.⁴²

21st April 1893

... It was all too good to last: Mr Samwell has resigned and will be leaving us at the end of May. He has accepted an invitation to go to St Paul's at Port Adelaide. This is one of the largest parishes in the Colony, where he will have the assistance of several curates, but I think Marion is a little worried about the class of people in that industrialised area, particularly as they now have two children to bring up. A daughter, Jean Eleanor, was born last July.

Although a young man still, Mr Samwell is highly thought of throughout the Diocese, and I think we have been fortunate to have had him as our priest for nearly five years. We know of at least two other offers he received: one in August 1890, and another in April the following year. On the first occasion he wrote in the *St Michael's Parish Magazine* (which he began soon after his arrival here) his reasons for declining the offer:

At the beginning of my ministerial life, I made a rule that in any question of change of sphere, the matter should



Fig. 3-15

*Hon. Sir
Arthur Blyth.
(Reproduced
from The
Representative
Men of South
Australia,
George E. Loyau,
Adelaide, 1883)*

be decided by the dictates of duty, rather than from any personal advantage which might accrue to myself. Acting upon this rule and after very anxious consideration, I have decided to continue my labours among you...

The Election Committee has been seeking a new incumbent and at last night's Annual Vestry a letter was read from Mr H.W. Hughes speaking highly of the abilities of Reverend Albert Wyndham Clampett, M.A. This testimony was fully supported by a Dr T.R. Hamilton and Mr D.C. Scott (solicitor) both of his present Parish of Laura. As a result the Committee has decided to offer the incumbency of St Michael's, Mitcham, to Mr Clampett.

A new committee has also been appointed to enquire into the cost of lighting the Church with gas...

* * *

From the time it was first licensed as a place of worship in 1852 to the departure some forty years later of Frederick Samwell – the last of the 'Colonial Incumbents' – St Michael's had had eight members of the clergy occupying the Cure for an average of just five years each. With the arrival of Albert Wyndham Clampett in 1893 came a prolonged period of stability and a new title: for the next 108 years there were to be only four men licensed as 'Rector of the Church of St Michael, Mitcham'.



Fig. 4-1 Reverend Albert Wyndham Clampett.
(Bowen Family album)

Fig. 4-2 Mrs Alice Clampett with her daughter Mollie, son Harold and her elderly mother, Mrs Patten, in the Rectory garden c.1910. (Bowen Family album)

