

# **A HISTORY OF THE WORK OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN ROCKDALE : 1887 TO 1987**

This brief history was originally prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of the first chapel. It has been edited and updated. Many names and events may not be mentioned. Nevertheless it is with thanksgiving to God we celebrate this occasion and give thanks to all who have contributed to what the Church of Christ is in Rockdale today.

## **(1) EARLY BEGINNINGS.**

In this history of the Church of Christ at Rockdale, we go back to the year 1887 when brother and sister McGregor set up the Lord's Table in their home in Gladstone Street, Bexley. This couple had been welcomed in to the church meeting in Sydney, two years earlier.

Two or three other members met with them, and later they decided to move to the Masonic Hall. The next move was to the Temperance Hall in George street, Rockdale. Meetings were then moved to 'Excelsior', in Rocky Point Road for a time, before moving back to the Temperance Hall.

In 1899 returns were sent to Conference showing a membership of 15. The following years saw the work go ahead, and then drop back, the membership rising to 38 then dropping to 28 in 1899.



Meeting with the McGregors over this period were: Mr. Mrs. Murchison, M. Mrs. Black, Mrs. McIntosh, Mrs. Henry, Mrs. Argent, Mr. Mrs. Farser, Mr. Mrs. Males, Mr. Mrs. Beatie, Mrs. W. Fately and Mr. Mrs. A. Gatley.

Brother and sister McGregor moved to Eastwood in 1904.

Mrs. Henry and her brother were the first Bible School scholars.

We have a minute book in our files that details business meetings financial records and membership in the period July 1895 to to January 1907. From 1911 to 1916 the membership averaged 13.

## (2) THE WORK GATHERS MOMENTUM

Brother H.G. Payne went to minister to the Church at Hurstville in 1916, being the first full time minister there. As there was no Church of Christ between Hurstville and Cook's River, except for the little band meeting at Rockdale, Brother Payne obtained the names and addresses of as many members in the district as he could. He visited these people and arranged meetings from which the present work dates.

In November 1918 there were only 52 members and as a result of 36 members moving into the district the Church grew to 88 in 1919. Brother Payne called a meeting of the Church on the 25th January 1918 with Brother C. Rush as Chairman, but owing to a number of members being unable to be present, the meeting was adjourned until 4th February when a good number were present. Brother H.G. Harward was elected Chairman of the meeting.

The first entry in the Church Minute Book read: "During the last few weeks of 1917 endeavour has been made with the assistance of Brother H.G. Payne of Hurstville to interest members of the Church of Christ resident in the district, in the local work."

As a result of the meeting on February 4th it was resolved that the Secretary, Brother C. Duff, should compile a list of members, that a Bible School be inaugurated on 10th February 1918, that a Gospel Service be held on the evening of the same day and succeeding Lord's days, speakers to be provided for Sunday mornings. On Sunday 10th February, Brother C.C.S. Rush offered to preach till Easter. This offer was gratefully accepted.

The position of the Church was now much improved, and the Home Missionary Committee helped organize the work, and by financial aid made it possible for Brother Stuart Stevens, who was ministering at Enmore, to take the position of the first full time minister at Rockdale. The first Quarterly meeting was held in the Temperance Hall, 29th April. Those present were: Sisters McIntosh, Gatley, Miss Burt, Misses G.V. and E. Waring, Bren. Black, D.M. Duff, G. Partridge, W.T. Coles, S. Stevens, F.T. Willis and C.F. Duff.

At this meeting it was decided to change the place of meeting from the Temperance Hall to the School of Arts, Rockdale, by 5th May 1918. A church paper was to be printed known as "Glad Tidings" and a committee was set up to select land for a Church home. On June 1st 1918 the first copy of "Glad Tidings" came off the press. We have a



# Glad Tidings

Issued by the Church of Christ, meeting in the School of Arts, Rockdale, pleading for the restoration of New Testament Christianity.

Mr. W. T. COLES,  
Business Manager, "Glenciva," Bay St.  
Brighton-le-Sands

Mr. STUART STEVENS,  
Editor

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## Stirring Messages

BY

Mr. Stuart Stevens  
SCHOOL-OF-ARTS HALL,  
ROCKDALE  
at 7 p.m.



JUNE 2—"THE OLD TIME RELIGION"  
" 9—"HITTING THE SAWDUST TRAIL"  
" 16—"AFTER DEATH"—WHAT?  
" 23—"MUDDLING THROUGH" (Kipling)  
" 30—"ETERNITY! ETERNITY!"

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copy of that first issue on our Church files. An extraordinary business meeting was called to discuss the recommendation that a property be purchased in Frederick Street, Rockdale, for our Church home. "It was proposed then by brother W.T. Coles, seconded by sister Golby, that we purchase the property known as "Wakefield School and Kindergarten" situated in Frederick Street, Rockdale for One Thousand Pounds."

## (3) EVANGELISM, GROWTH AND THE FIRST CHAPEL

The first Annual Meeting revealed that the Church had grown by 38 members. The Bible School had been started and

Gospel Services commenced. A full time minister in the person of Mr. Stuart Stevens had taken up the work, the Church paper "Glad Tidings" was being issued free, at 1000 copies, a regular point of distribution being Rockdale Railway Station, and land had been purchased for the prospective Church home.

In 1919 the Chandler-Clay party held a mission, and though forced to close early because of the pneumonia influenza epidemic, the Conference Report from Rockdale for 1919 read: "Stuart Stevens Preacher, fine block of land secured, 45 additions, 100 added to the Bible School, Church building and self-supporting Church quite possible this year."

At a meeting on April 6th 1919 the Church decided to move to Rockdale Town Hall, rental, 25 shillings a



week. This would allow for three meetings on Sunday. This meeting coincided with the closing of the Chandler-Clay mission as a result of the previously mentioned influenza epidemic.

Later the Church decided to sell the cottage on a 50' frontage to Frederick Street, at not less than Seven Hundred and Fifty Pounds. The amount received was to be used as a deposit on a Chapel. As a result of the sale, Seven Hundred and Fifty Pounds was received, and it was then agreed to sell the remainder of the property in Frederick Street as it was learned that two blocks of ground in Bryant Street, each 40'x 125' were available for the purchase price of 1 allotment at Six Pounds Ten Shillings a foot and the other at Five Pounds Five Shillings per foot. This is the property where our Church buildings now stand.

Brother Stuart Stevens relinquished the work in 1921 after serving the Church faithfully for three years.

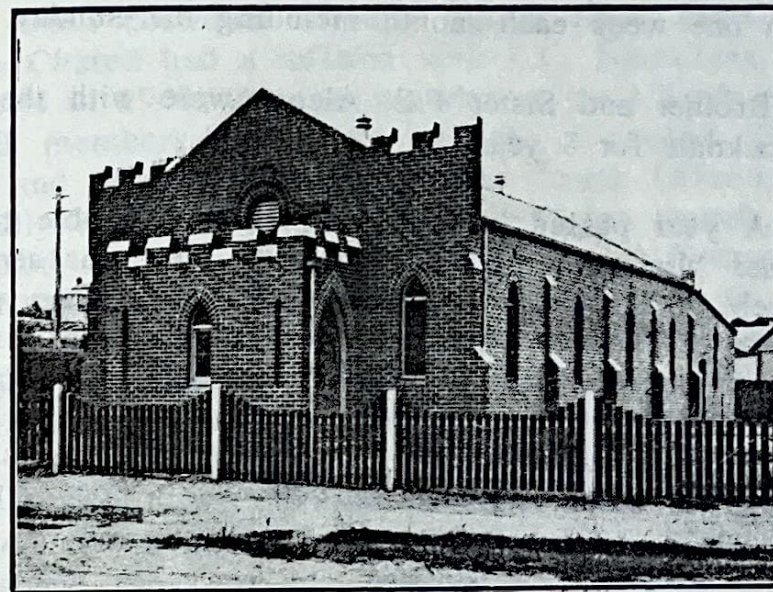
Brother J. Clydesdale commenced his ministry on 1st February 1922.

In July 1922 plans and specifications for the new Chapel were obtained, and in the following September the tender of Mr. Burgin was accepted, his price being One Thousand and Ninety Five Pounds. Bren. W.T. Coles, W.D. Lang and E.V. Sainty were appointed Trustees.

Saturday, 24th February 1923 was a red letter day for the Church, for on that day the Chapel was officially opened by Brother J. Crawford Conference Vice president. In the afternoon an appeal was launched by Brother C.C.S. Rush and as a result Four Hundred and Sixty Pounds was obtained in cash and promises.

# Opening and Dedication of New Chapel

On Saturday, February 24th, 1923



At night a splendid meeting under the Chairmanship of brother H.G. Harward was held when the following Sister Churches gave greetings: Erskenville, Hurstville, Marrickville, City Temple and Banksia Free Church.

The following Officers and Deacons were appointed at that time: Minister: Mr. J. Clydesdale. Secretary: Mr. E.V. Sainty. Assistant Secretary: Mr. C. Waring. Treasurer: Mr. W.T. Coles. Assistant Treasurer: Mr. A. Coomber. Deacons: Bren. R. Golby, N. Goyen, W.D. Lang and G. Partridge.

In December it was arranged for a tent mission led by brother H.G. Harward to commence in January 1924. The church had another mission with Baker and Clay in August 1925.



Brother E.V. Sainty resigned as Secretary in 1924 and brother C. Sorrell was elected to fill the vacancy.

In May 1932, Rockdale offered to help the Church at Bexley North by allowing brother Alcorn to go to Bexley North one week each month including the Sunday.

Brother and Sister F.E. Alcorn were with the Church at Rockdale for 8 years.

A year passed before the Church was able to secure another Minister. Brother H. Priestly who was serving the Church at Bankstown was invited at a salary of Four Pounds per week. Salary to be reviewed each year in the light of the financial position of the Church. During this twelve months interim the Church was served by Bren. C. Everett of Mosman and A.L. Carter of Rockdale. Brother H. Priestly commenced his ministry with the Church at Rockdale in 1936. Brother H. Priestly spared

not himself in his efforts to preach the Gospel, until his sudden and unexpected death cut short his stay.

On the death of Brother H. Priestly, brother A.L. Carter was approached to see if he would help Rockdale with speaking appointments. This he did gladly, and as a result of this ministry many souls were added to the Church. Brother Carter continued this ministry from June 1939 to January 1940 and in this time rendered a splendid ministry.

#### (4) RAPID GROWTH FOLLOWED BY DECLINE

Brother A.N. Hinrichsen arrived from New Zealand in January 1940 to lead the Church at Rockdale. In common

with many other Churches, the Rockdale Church had suffered financially and in membership because of the depression and it was good to see the interest growing and the general tone if the Church improve.

The work continued steadily during these years and when the Church had a mission with E.C. Hinrichsen and V.B. Morris in 1940, there were added to the Church more than 100 members while the offering exceeded Three Hundred and Twenty Pounds. It was Thank Offering in 1941 finally totaled Eight Hundred and Eighty Pounds. It was decided in 1940 to raise all Brotherhood finance by means of the Duplex envelopes and it is pleasing to note that the response has been most gratifying, this was revealed in the financial statement for 1940, the year showed total receipts in excess of Nine Hundred Pounds.

Brother and Sister A.N. Hinrichsen served the Church from 1940 to 1944. Average attendance at the Lord's Table reached 150. At this time the value of the Church property was in excess of Two Thousand Pounds.

Brother and Sister George Burns then came to Rockdale from Mosman to the ministry of the Church here. The ministry commenced in 1944 and concluded in 1948. It was during their ministry that a Bible Class Room was added to the Church building, and the manse in Oswell Street was purchased. At the conclusion of a very helpful ministry at Rockdale, Brother and Sister Burns returned to the Mosman Church who had invited them to return.

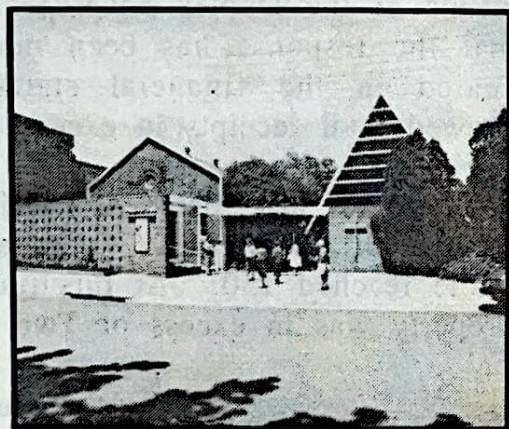
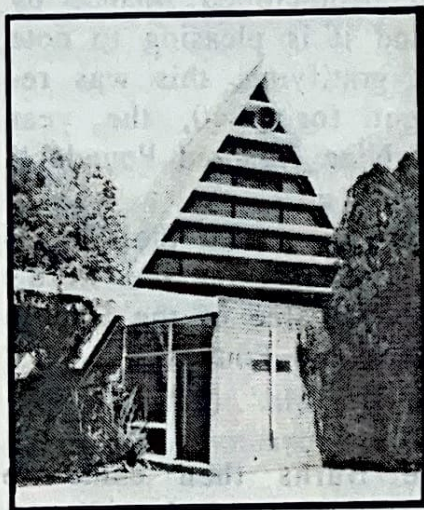
In February 1948 brother and sister G.J. Andrews came from the church at Ballarat, Victoria. This added to



the strengthening of the Church in life and witness. They were with us here till 1954.

#### (5) A NEW CHAPEL AND BUILDING EXTENSIONS

August 14th 1954 brother and sister A.B. Clark then came to minister at Rockdale. It was during this ministry that plans were made for the extension of the building program of the Church including the erection of the new Chapel on the spare block of ground. Brother and Sister A.B. Clark concluded their ministry with Rockdale in March 1959.



Brother Denby Holmes, a student at the Churches of Christ Bible College Woolwich came in March 1959 and served faithfully till August 1959. It was during this time that the new Chapel was erected, and opened on 8th August 1959. This also marked the commencement of the ministry of Dr. and Mrs. C.J. Mackenzie who served the Church till 1970. During this ministry the first Chapel had the old Kindergarten Hall and kitchen demolished and the new extension built including the new kitchen and large Hall providing room for Kindergarten and other activities.

George Elliot conducted an interim ministry throughout 1970. Then Lyle and Bess Wylie ministered from 1971 through to January 1977. Their ministry was followed by that of two college students - Jeff Deuble and Jim Newton.

The membership had fallen from a high of 271 in 1945 to 49 in 1979. Morning attendances were now averaging 46, with 29 at the evening services. Times had certainly changed from the 1930's and 40's. There was now an increasing proportion of non-English speaking migrants living in the area. This change started in the 1950's, and gathered momentum in the 60's and 70's. By 1980 30% of the population of Rockdale was overseas born. There are now significant numbers of more than 23 nationalities in the area, the major migrant groups being Italian, Greek, Macedonian and Lebanese.

#### (6) ROCKDALE AND TEMPE JOIN FORCES

In response to the changing circumstances the Rockdale and Tempe churches decided to join together and form the Church of Christ Rockdale and Districts. The Tempe church had a membership of 23. Robert Hough was the minister. It was felt that by combining the resources an effective work could be conducted.

The Tempe property was sold, and a shop/residence next door to the Rockdale buildings was purchased. Rockdale Bookworm commenced. Robert and Sylvia Hough continued in ministry until January 1983, when Peter and Christine Holt were called to take up the work. Membership and attendances continued to decline. By 1985 the membership had fallen to 41. Significant changes were needed.



## **(7) NEW DIRECTIONS AND GROWTH**

Following a report on the church and the community by the Department of Church Development and Education, and also helpful input and assistance from the Wollongong church, a number of significant changes were made. A positive approach was adopted, focusing on the possibilities that God provides, rather than being absorbed by the difficulties. Did we want to grow? Yes! Were we prepared to pay the price? Yes! The Carlton manse was sold. The debt on the shop property was paid. The church appointed Barry Barakat as Associate Pastor, commencing in December 1986. In the meantime the church was growing. Morning attendances were rising again, and then at the end of September that year we rejoiced when Audrey Payne was baptized into Christ. Between then and now the Lord has blessed us with 15 people going through the waters of baptism. Over the same period of time 27 people have been welcomed into membership.

It is exciting to be a part of what the Lord is doing. We have a long way to go yet. We must continue to grow to maturity as a church. There are many in our community who do not know Christ. God has a task for us. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we embark on the journey together.

So it is with gratitude in our hearts for all the pioneers whose names and actions may not be recorded here, as well as those who do, that we present this brief survey. Some records are not available having been lost in the process of time. So we close and give God thanks for the wonder of the fellowship of His Church. To God be all the glory, Great things He has done.