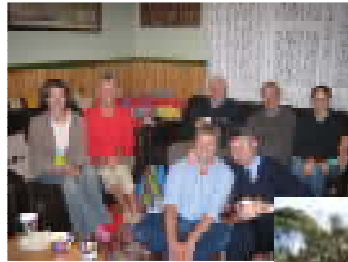




**Building People for God in the 1950's**

A crowded Sunday School building in 1958. Rev Bailey is leading. A new Sunday School building was opened in Nov 1960 to meet the growth

**St John's Anglican Church Highton  
150 years of worship and influence in  
Highton and beyond, for God's glory  
1868 - 2008**



**Building People for God in 2008**

**Some others who are also celebrating 150 years in 2008:**

Bendigo Bank, Melbourne Grammar, AFL, Wesley Uniting Melbourne, Sydney Weather Observatory, Shipping on the Murray River

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**Celebration Service - 7<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

History compiled by Todd Hawker

## Beginnings 1858 -1867

In 1858 the first recorded Anglican services in Highton were held in a little freestone hall which was the Church of England Day School. This building was situated in Barrabool Road, opposite the cemetery.

The school had opened four years earlier on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 1854 at a cost of £1,100. £300 was provided by local subscriptions and £600 was granted by the Denominational Board (in three grants of £200). Three prominent members of the Geelong community formed the building Committee in the construction of this school. They were:

- John Highett, of Highton House in the Barrabool Hills, was one of the two pioneers of that area.
- Edward Sandford, a partner in the firm Sandford and Harwood, solicitors to the Corporation of Geelong for a time. Sandford was also one of the trustees of the Orphan Asylum at the time of the laying of the foundation stone on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1855.
- Charles Nuttall Thorne was the owner of “Thornehill”, a property with a lodge and vineyard on thirty acres of land at the west end of Thornehill Road, which was made when his properties were subdivided for sale. Thorne was also a prominent local businessman and one of the seven original members of the South Barwon Council of 1857.

In 1866, a movement commenced in Highton to build a church. On November 22, 1866, the foundation stone of the building in its present location, was laid by the Very Rev. Dean Macartney. The land had been given by Mr. G.F. Belcher. In January, 1867, the church was opened.

The establishment of the early Highton church was made easier as a result of grants by the Victorian colony. In 1836, the Church Act had been introduced to ensure the development of churches and the presence of institutional christianity throughout the growing colonies. By the time the Church in Highton was constructed, state aid in the various colonies was coming to an end (State aid ended in Victoria in the early 1870s). The



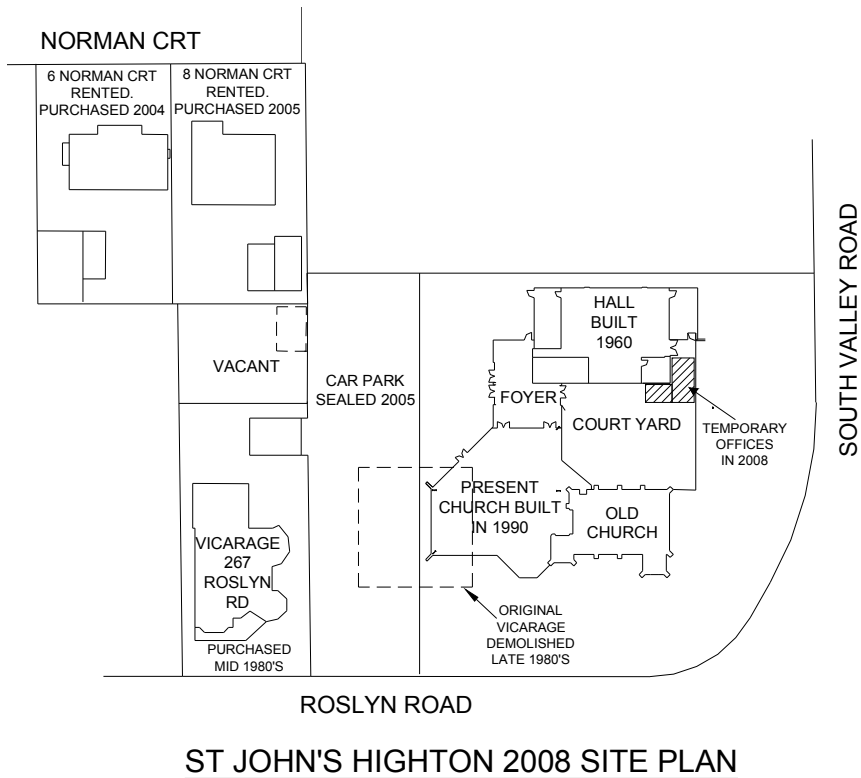
*Destruction caused by the 1926 Tornado*



**Geelong Advertiser May 8 1989**

Parishioners gathered at the St John's Anglican Church Highton yesterday for the dedication of the site of the planned new building. The wooden stake was hammered into a corner of the building site to symbolise the laying of foundations.

The stake, held by Building Committee President John Anderson, was hammered into place by Les Allen. The present Vicar, Rev Len Greenhall watched.



View from Roslyn Road in 2008

Diocesan Year Book of 1867 lists grants of £270 for the Church, and £65 for the stipend.

The 1868 Diocesan Year Book also gives not only financial information but other details of St John's first full year of Christian worship.

**Receipts**

Pew rents	£48.19.0 (48 pounds, 19 shillings and 0 pence)
Offerories	£29.17.10
Grants: Stipend	£ 59.11.8
Building	£112.10.0

**Expenditure**

Stipend	£80.0.0
Other	£5.10.6

No. of services held – 54

Average attendance – 65

Sunday School Scholars – 39	21 male	18 female
Sunday School Teachers – 5	3 male	2 female

The payment of pew rents was the traditional way of raising funding for the Church, vastly different to modern methods of BPay payments and electronic transfers. Pew rents was an English method imported to the



Barrabool Church 1884

Australian colonies. Rents were paid by parishioners in yearly amounts for a pew in the church. Pews that were well placed were generally more expensive. Pew rents gradually faded as egalitarianism strengthened throughout the church and colonies.

## The Early Highton Church 1868 - 1925

The *Church of England Messenger* dated 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1869, provides a picture of the early St John's community.

The little Church at Highton stands among a considerable population, and gathers a large congregation. This district is one of those which have suffered extensively from the depression of the farming interest. The Church of England has been seriously affected here by the frequent change of clergymen. We believe, however, that the present incumbent here met with growing encouragement in his work.

Another document that provides a snapshot of life at St John's Highton in the late 1800's, was the Annual Report of 1886. It states:

The Committee of St. John's Church, Highton, has much pleasure in laying the Report for the past year before the Congregation; for although the outlay has been unusually heavy, the income from various sources has equalled the expenditure.

In every department of work, the Church shows an advance on the last few years. The offertory and pew rents have increased, the Morning Services have been well attended, while the Evening Services now held throughout the year, instead of as formerly during the summer months, seem to supply a want felt by many members of the Congregation.

The Committee has to call attention to the fact that during the year the interior of the Church has been entirely repainted and renovated in addition to other small improvements which have been carried out.

During the early part of the year, a Sale of Gifts was held in the Temperance Hall, Highton. It was at first proposed with a view of purchasing a new organ for the church; but, owing to the kind of exertion of the friends who got up the Sale, the financial result proved so much larger than was anticipated, that not only was a suitable instrument purchased for the Church, but a surplus



Rev Ross Green



Rev Mark Schnerring



Rev Pete Adlem



Rev Simon Koefoed



Rev Andrew Grills



Rev Stephen Brown



VICARS OF ST JOHN'S HIGHTON	
Rev. J.A SULLIVAN	1858 – 1861
Rev. T.W. SERGEANT	1861 – 1863
Rev. C.S. PERRY	1863 – 1866
Rev. H.J. EDWARDS	1866 – 1868
Rev. W. HUTCHINSON	1868 – 1877
Rev. H.A. FAWNS	1877 – 1878
Rev. W.T. POWELL	1878 – 1880
Rev. G.E.W. SPROULE	1880 – 1888
Rev. J. CAMERON	1888 – 1905
Rev. W.J.T. PAY	1906 – 1911
Rev. A.M. CAPPER	1912 – 1916
Rev. J.W.P. OATES	1916 – 1918
Rev. F. PARSONS	1918 – 1922
Rev. W.P. BAINBRIDGE	1922 – 1927
Rev. H.W.R. TOPP	1927 – 1928
Rev. E.L. PANELLI	1928 – 1930
Rev. H.G. MATTHEWS	1930 – 1946
Vacant	1947 – 1951
Rev. S.J. MUXWORTHY	1951 – 1955
Rev. H.R.L. BAILEY	1956 – 1959
Rev. J.L. RICHARDS	1960 – 1978
Rev. P. HARRADENCE	1978 – 1982
Rev. L. GREENHALL	1982 – 1994
Rev R. GREEN	1995 – 2007
Rev. S. KOEFOED (acting)	2008
Rev W. ORPWOOD (Vicar elect)	2009 -

ASSISTANT CURATES AT ST JOHN'S	
Rev. M. SCHNERRING	1999 - 2001
Rev. P. ADLEM	2002 - 2005
Rev. S. KOEFOED	2006 - 2007
Rev. A. GRILLS	2007 -
Rev. S. BROWN	2008 -



Rev. H.R.L. Bailey



Rev. J.L. Richards



Rev Peter Harradence



Rev Len Greenhall

remained which enabled the Committee to erect a **new school room** on a piece of ground adjacent to the Church ground, which has materially contributed to the progress of the Sunday School, and conduced to the convenience of the congregation, we have no longer to suffer from the discomfort inevitable on holding Sunday School in the Church.

The Committee note with satisfaction that the number of the children on the roll of the Sunday School show a slight advance on previous years. Much credit is due to the Sunday School teachers for the unwearied labours in the great work of instructing the children in the Word of God. A Service of Song was given in the course of the year, which it is hoped will be followed by other efforts of a similar character.

Lastly the committee desire to express their best thanks to those who assist in the musical portion of the Sunday services for their efficient help in that important part of the worship of Almighty God.

St John's Highton was just one of three churches in a parochial district. The other two churches were Holy Trinity, Barrabool, and St Saviour's, Modewarre. A busy schedule of services occurred each week as the vicar (assisted by lay readers), led services in the three churches. St John's would eventually grow to be the largest congregation of the three but during its early history, the Vicar was based at Holy Trinity, Barrabool.

In 1896, doubts emerged as to whether the church had been consecrated. Consequently, a Board of Guardians was elected in place of a Vestry. In 1907 the church was consecrated by Henry Lowther Clarke, the Archbishop of Melbourne. During the Annual Meeting of St John's on the 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1908, a Vestry was elected since this was formally the first occasion that the Congregation was entitled to elect a Vestry.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, parishes like St John's, were important social centres. They offered various social groups for parishioners to become involved in – guilds, parish vestries, Sunday Schools, the Church of

England Men's society, branches of the Mothers Union, and missionary support organisations.

The experience of parish life and worship was also different during the early decades at St John's. Lighting was not yet from electricity. Lamps existed inside and outside of the parish to provide adequate lighting for the congregation. Horses were the form of transport. The minutes of the vestry meetings during the first couple of decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century frequently mention such items as the construction of a stable in 1904 for the Vicar's horse and in 1923 the approval for the purchase of a new horse for the Vicar. Parishioners were expected to bring their own prayer and hymn books to worship and it was only in 1907 that some additional prayer and hymn books were purchased for the use of visitors.



The Vestry at St John's, with the Vicar Rev. W. Bainbridge (approx 1924)



Rev R. J. Oats 1916 - 1918



Rev W.J.T. Pay 1906 - 1911

In most urban dioceses the churches with the biggest congregations, and the highest income from direct giving, were strongly evangelical in their theology, and they formed a bigger proportion of churchgoers than ever before.... These churches offered a range of specialist ministries especially for youth, sponsored missionaries overseas and sought to involve all members of the congregation in home fellowship groups that met mid-weekly. They demonstrated that a religion which demanded commitment, combined with styles of leadership and worship that were attuned to contemporary culture and able to offer something special for every age-group, had drawing power in a society where many people wanted community and a direction in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

From humble beginnings, the little parish in Highton has evolved from a small rural church into a major Anglican centre of worship. The parish has strongly focused on mission and in this endeavour; it has been aided by strong ordained and lay leadership, particularly in recent decades. St John's is well placed to continue serving God and our community for many years to come.

#### References:

A brief history of St John's was put together by Mr and Mrs Hedley Potts around 1960. This previous history was the primary source of historical material occurring before this date.

St John's Annual Reports 1960-1980, 1989, 1992-93, 1998-2001, 2004-2005.

Register of Services 1961-1992, 1992-current.

The Parish Paper 1958 editions between 1957-1966

National Church Life Surveys, St John's Highton 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2006

'New Church at Highton offers adaptable worship', Church Scene, No 585, Dec 7, 1990

David Hilliard, 'Pluralism and New Alignments in Society and Church', *Anglicanism in Australia*, Ed Bruce Kaye, p 133

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<sup>1</sup> Hilliard, 'Pluralism and New Alignments in Society and Church', *Anglicanism in Australia*, p 133

during this period and proved to be quite successful in reaching out to people in the community who wanted to know more about the Christian faith. In 1999 the vestry also approved a deficit budget so as to seriously invest in youth related mission. The 7pm service was reintroduced in July 1999 (the Evening Prayer services having ceased in the early 1990s). This service was youth orientated and continues to the present day.



View from South Valley Road after 1990 extensions

As membership grew, additional ministry resources became possible and curate positions have become a feature of St John's during the 2000's. St John's has been blessed by these additional ministry resources. St John's is increasingly defining its role as an equipping parish that contributes to the development of Christian leadership through nurture and support of successive curate positions and others undertaking ministry training. The expanded ministry team has enabled the parish to focus on and successfully implement further mission strategies – particularly in regards to youth and young families. In 2007, a new 5pm service was established partly as a result of seating capacity issues in the 10am service. There are now four services each Sunday at St John's, not to mention the varied other activities that occur within the parish community each and every week.

As at 2008, St John's is the embodiment of a healthy community church. An examination of the Register of Services between 1961 and 2004 reveals that the annual number of people attending Church services at St John's has increased by approximately 300 percent over this period. It has a diverse and vibrant parish community that is increasingly represented across all age groups. In *Pluralism and New Alignments in Society and Church*, the historian David Hilliard offers a description of a modern parish with an Evangelical orientation. It is a description that encapsulates St John's remarkably well.

## Disaster and Renewal 1926-1949

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1926, a tornado struck the Church at exactly 5pm. The following morning the *Geelong Advertiser* estimated the wind speed to be more than 200 miles per hour, and recorded the following description:

The scene at St. John's Church of England at Highton was ghastly. The bare walls of the Church were standing gaunt and grim and the Sunday School, a weatherboard building, lay against a large tree, its days of service ended.



The restoration of the Church was carried out without delay, with the rebuilding using as much as was practicable of the original materials. Monetary gifts were received from many individuals and churches as well as donations of a lectern, an organ, a pulpit, communion linen, and the honorary services of an architect. Contrary to the belief of the *Geelong Advertiser*, the Sunday School was able to be repaired during the reconstruction.

Sadly, many of the historical records of St John's were lost as a result of the tornado and this has made the task of compiling a comprehensive history of the early St John's Church more difficult. For example, in 2007

the St John's Ladies Guild celebrated its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In fact, the Ladies Guild is actually much older than this – it simply no longer has the records to verify the exact age of the Guild. At the time of the tornado, the president of the Ladies Guild was the Guild's longest serving member. The age of the Guild has since been counted from the year that this member joined the organisation.

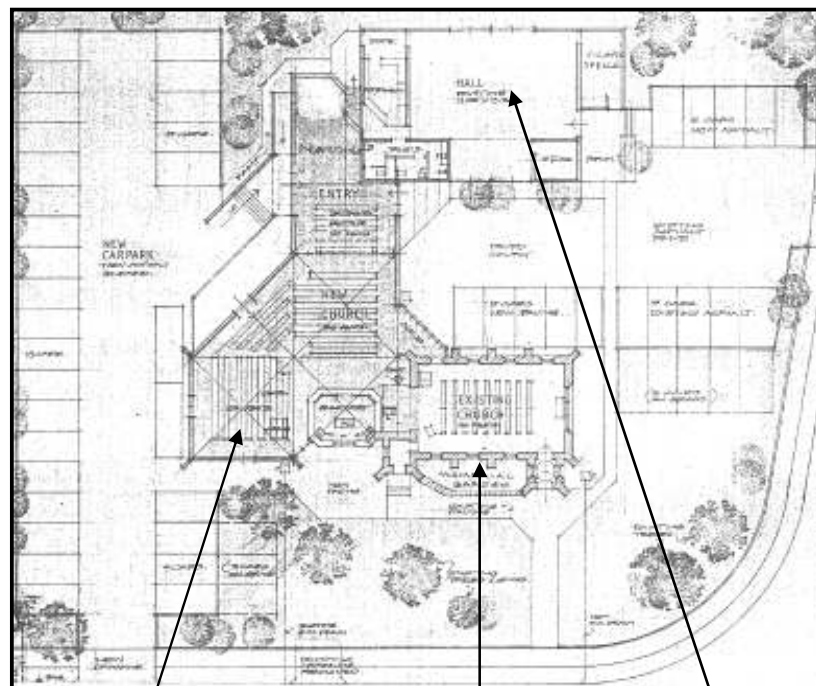
In between the tornado and the restoration of the Church, the Methodists came to the aid of St John's, offering to share their memorial hall for combined Church services, while Sunday School and Vestry meetings were held in private homes.

St John's was restored and re-opened on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1927. Archdeacon Hayman gave a sermon on Haggai. One verse in particular (2:11) had a special impact on the congregation: 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty', and 'In this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.'

The only addition to the original structure made at this time was the construction of the spire instead of the tower.



larger number as equally as a service for say, 100, without feeling lost.' The new worship centre linked the original church and the parish hall (the 1960s Sunday school) together. 'The plan of the new extension has evolved through the need to relate the existing historic church with its existing hall, adding kitchen and toilet amenities. Parish members had donated significant amounts of money for the new worship centre. The Diocese of Melbourne had given \$70,000 for the project. The parish had also taken a long term loan through the Anglican development fund to acquire the remaining monies needed to fund the project (these loans are expected to be completely cleared by the end of 2008).



New Church  
(shaded areas)

Existing Church

Existing Hall

The church grew quite significantly in the late 1990s and early 2000s under Ross Green's leadership. The Alpha course was introduced to the parish



Christian education; building and maintenance and finance. Lay participation was introduced for the communion services. The 7pm service of Evening Prayer was also experimented with, and a number of renewal-type services introduced. St John's formally separated from the parishes of St Saviours Modewarre, and Holy Trinity Barrabool around this time. Although St Saviours would close, Holy Trinity Barrabool continues to the present day.

Seating capacity issues emerged during this period. The leadership team of St John's would spend several years grappling with how the capacity issue could be satisfactorily resolved. The idea of expanding the church building occurred during this time. In 1986 the mid-morning service was moved from the church to the church hall as a result of overcrowding. During 1987 the vestry discussed and canvassed views from the parish for the possible construction of a new worship centre to solve the overcrowding issues for some services and anticipation of future parish needs. A large amount of prayer events occurred at this time. On April 5 a special parish meeting was called to discuss the proposed new 'worship centre'. The motion was put to a vote and was carried overwhelmingly. Over the next couple of years, the vestry dealt with a number of issues connected with the new worship centre – in particular the planning and financial aspects of the development.



View from South Valley Road before the 1990 extensions

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1990 the new worship centre was dedicated by the Rt. Revd. John Bayton. Costing \$530,000 to complete. The dedication service was attended by 600 people. In the December edition

of *Church Scene*, Rev. Len Greenhall commented that the new church building offers a 'spaciousness that enables us to conduct services for a

## Expansion and Growth 1950-Present

In 1951, a Vicarage was built on the grounds of St John's. The Vicar for St John's Highton, St Saviour's Modewarre, and Holy Trinity Barrabool, was based in Highton from this time. A church service timetable from the 1958 Parish Paper gives some indication of the busy series of services conducted within the Parochial district.

CHURCH	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	5 <sup>th</sup> Sunday
St John's HIGHTON	10 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Morn Prayer 3 p.m. Baptisms 5 p.m. Youth Tea 7 p.m. Evening Prayer	10 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Holy Com 7 p.m. Evening Prayer	10 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Morn. Prayer 7 p.m. Evening Prayer	8 a.m. Holy Com. 10 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Morn. Prayer 7 p.m. Evening Prayer	10 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Holy Com. 7 p.m. Evening Prayer
Holy Trinity BARRABOOL	9.30 a.m. Morn. Prayer	1.45 p.m. Evening Prayer 2.45 p.m. Sun School	11 a.m. Holy Com.	2.15 p.m. Sun. School 3 p.m. Evening Prayer	3 p.m. Evening Prayer
St Saviour's MODEWARRE	10.30 a.m. Sun. School 11 a.m. Holy Communion	2.30 p.m. Sun School 3 p.m. Evening Prayer	2.30 p.m. Even Prayer & Family Service	1.45 p.m. Even Prayer 2.45 p.m. Sunday School	

In the late 1950s the parish anticipated a future very different from its past. In the December edition of the 1958 Parish Paper, the Vicar – H.R.L Bailey commented:

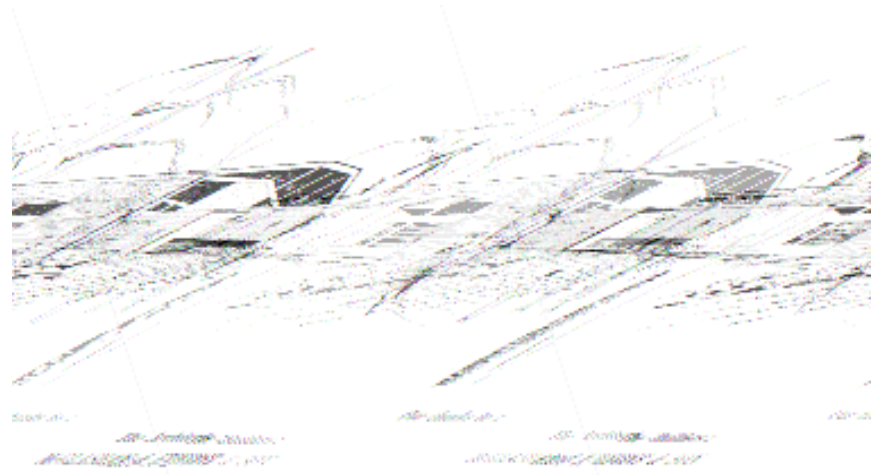
After the service at which the confirmees had their first communion, someone was heard to say, “St John’s is beginning to breathe.’ The expression was apt, for it does describe what is taking place. It was not said with any spirit of criticism of the past, for the person who made the remark, has been connected with the Church for years. We can but be thankful for those who, through the years that have gone, have kept the banner flying in Highton. To use another figure of speech, we can say the roots have gone down deep into the soil because, for years, St John’s was a typical village Church. In the march of events, Highton is now a fast developing suburb of Geelong, and almost daily new families are arriving.

During the 1950s and 1960s, major residential growth took place in Highton as the suburb was further subdivided and settled. In a brochure designed to promote St John’s to the Highton community in 1958, the positive outlook was encapsulated by the following comment: ‘we approach our centenary year of 1958 with the prospect of the greatest advances yet in our church’s history’.

In 1958, a census of St John’s Anglican Church in Highton was taken. This revealed that the church had a membership of 156 families. A major evangelistic effort was made to reach out to the burgeoning Highton community. By June 1963, the number of families on the Parish roll at St John’s was 230 families.

By the late 1950s, the population growth in the Highton area and the post war baby-boom resulted in an urgent need to upgrade the Sunday school facilities at St John’s. In a letter to the Melbourne Diocese registrar on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1958, the vestry of St John’s

Highton stated that a new Sunday school was essential. The letter advises that architects have been approached to draw up a ‘master plan for the whole property, taking into consideration the needs of the years to come’. Essential to this plan was the enlargement of the existing Church site. Land adjacent to the southern boundary of the site was purchased and the new Sunday school was built. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1960, the new Sunday school was opened.



Despite the increasing urbanisation of the Highton area the rural heritage of St John’s was still evident during the 1960s. A harvest thanksgiving service – an obvious indicator of the parish’s rural origins – was still in place. Parish income was also supplemented by the sowing of Dunn peas in a paddock in Barrabool.

St John’s was a typical Anglican parish with an array of additional activities outside of the regular Sunday services. Ladies guild, youth fellowship, men’s teas, Sunday school, choir, and mid-week bible study groups complemented formal Sunday worship.

In the early 1980s there were a number of significant changes. Vestry was restructured to include committees for evangelism, publicity, worship,