

'No institution is more vividly expressive of the English genius for creative muddle than the Anglican Church.'

Roger Scruton, 'Prayers in Stone: The meaning of an English church,'
The Spectator Australia, 10 November 2012, p.12.

An English Church in Australian soil

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Introduction

In recent years several general histories of Australian Anglicanism have appeared together with a plethora of books, articles and postgraduate theses dealing with various aspects of the church's history. One theme that has not been adequately explored, however, relates to the changing relationship between the Australian church and that from which it sprang in England. Admittedly, there are some articles and the occasional book that deal with the subject, but only in reference to specific themes, or limited periods.¹ General histories, particularly the recent ones edited by Bruce Kaye, former General Secretary of the Australian Anglican Church and Tom Frame, previously head of St Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra, leave the subject largely alone.² My own previous writing has concentrated on the way in which Anglicanism shaped the course of national history in Australia.³

Two factors alerted me recently, however, to the existence of a gap in the historiography of Australian Anglicanism. The first was the seminal book, *Australia's Empire*, edited by two leading historians, Deryck Schreuder and Stuart Ward. Their object was to remind Australians that the imperial connection, once recognised as having key importance for understanding Australian history, had slipped into the background and needed restoring.⁴ Their book included a valuable chapter on religion by Hilary Carey although there was only limited space for a discussion of Anglicanism. My thought was to carry the idea behind the book a little further by focusing on the Anglican Church and making more of the British connection.

Second, the idea sparked more than the intellectual curiosity about the past that naturally inspires the historian. Personal considerations also came

into play. My experience of Anglicanism was shaped by my upbringing in England and experiences in Australia. My formative years were spent in a nation suffering the effects of depression and war. Naturally, the nation looked for guidance and comfort to the Church of England which was still deeply embedded in the national psyche. Monarch and church were closely linked: to be truly English was to be Anglican. My faith was a natural outcome of that cultural identification and was strengthened by the influence of parents, relatives and friends. All were staunchly Church of England. So, too, were the elementary schools I attended and the Maidstone Grammar School where I completed my education. There, every day opened with the school assembling for communal prayer, hymn-singing and Bible-reading. For me, this social and spiritual enculturation was capped by detailed studies of the English Reformation while I was in the Sixth Form preparing to enter Oxford University. Vital, too, was life as a chorister at the local church, St Peter's, which was of ancient lineage and High Church leanings. My faith accompanied me to Australia in 1949 where worship in a succession of churches, culminating in St Alban's at Epping (a suburb in Sydney's north-west), enabled me to observe first-hand the whole church becoming more Australian. Yet, the church retained much that had been inherited from England. Clearly, the British heritage was firmly etched into its corporate life and the outlook of its people. I was conscious that this heritage had also imprinted itself on me, thus strengthening my resolve to explain why it was so enduring. Acting on this resolve led me to examine the Australian church's history since 1788 with a view to identifying the elements of continuity and discontinuity. What follows satisfies personal instincts as well as the desire to present a fuller understanding of the church.

The importance of the English theme is reflected in the fact that the Australian church included the words 'Church of England' in its title until 1981 and drew most of its leaders and followers from Britain. The Australian offspring was doctrinally divided along lines similar to those within the English church. Its people used the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* subscribed to the 39 Articles of Religion and sang from hymnals that had been compiled in the 'mother country' as many referred to England. Church architecture was deeply influenced by that current in Britain and so too was the design of church interiors. To enter an Anglican church in Australia and worship there on Sunday was, in fact, to be transported in time and place to the land where the church originated. The same held

true both of those for whom the letters 'C of E' effectively meant no more than attendance at 'Christmas and Easter' and who, at best, sought its ministrations for marriage, baptism and funerals but little else. If only temporarily, they found themselves in an English setting where quite often the Union Jack adorned the sanctuary.

Invariably, however, the Australian flag hung opposite, serving as a reminder that the church could not simply be categorised as English. The voice heard from the pulpit was often resonant with the polished tones and practiced intonation of southern English but increasingly was replaced by an educated Australian accent. I noticed these and other signs of the emergence of an Australian ethos at the time of my arrival. And with the passing of each decade I realised the flavour became steadily more pronounced. How and why had that happened? Here was another historical question that led me back to the evolution of the church in Australia and the society in which it existed. Comparisons were needed to show how the Australian church was influenced not only by the land from which it sprang but the land of its adoption as well. Physically the two differed greatly, the one a small, 'green and pleasant' land located in the centre of world power; the other a vast bronzed continent situated at the 'far side of the world'. Whereas the one was until recently a great imperial nation with a long and complex past; the other took the form of an assemblage of colonies first settled by Europeans in 1788 that eventually grew into a stable and sophisticated nation. History had fashioned in England a class-based society that was not translated to Australia where society was much more open and democratic. These were just a few of the differences that involved the Australian church in a steady process of adaptation.

Nor should it be forgotten that the English church was itself constantly evolving despite its innate conservatism and commitment to tradition. This was particularly true of the period under review when Anglicanism followed the Union Jack across the empire to remote and distant parts of the world. In England, the church responded to the needs of a nation where the village was replaced by overcrowded industrial towns, factories took over from domestic industry and democracy prevailed over autocracy and gained a hold over the nation. Gradually the church renewed itself and removed many long-standing abuses. It was a church on the move, ever open to new ideas, engaged in internal reform and heavily involved in foreign missionary work. The dynamic forces at work within the Established Church of England influenced the Australian Church until

late in the twentieth century when both found themselves drifting apart and in difficult circumstances that required local responses to culturally specific challenges.

Such are the contours of the present study. It endeavours to explain how what was, by definition, a derivative church remained in part so while it adjusted over more than two centuries to a new environment and a different social order. It makes no pretence to being a complete history of Australian Anglicanism since 1788. The emphasis is rather on those features which are germane to the themes under review. Hopefully exploration of these themes will give rise to a fuller appreciation of Australian Anglicanism and of the British dimension of Australian history which is now overlooked or, perhaps worse, deliberately disparaged. Those interested in the developments that took place in other parts of the Anglican communion may gain something from learning about what happened in Australia. Perhaps there is scope for a series of volumes, each showing how the various Anglican provinces were affected by their surrounds and how this influenced their relationship with the English church. Such a series may well heighten our understanding of the nature of Anglicanism which is frequently viewed only from the centre.

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Sydney, Australia
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Endnotes

- 1 Examples by historians such as Hilary Carey, Michael Gladwin and Rowan Strong are listed in the bibliography to the current book.
- 2 Bruce Kaye *et al*, (eds), *Anglicanism in Australia: a History*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002; Tom Frame, *Anglicanism in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007.
- 3 Brian Fletcher, *The Place of Anglicanism in Australia: Church, Society and Nation*, Broughton Publishing, Melbourne, 2008.
- 4 Deryck Schreuder and Stuart Ward (eds), *Australia's Empire*, Oxford History of the British Empire Series, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.

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erving God on one wing

Early background

That a religious body known as the 'Church of England' existed on the Australian continent during the early years of British settlement is surely incontestable. Contemporary documents, including those of an official nature, stated as much. The *Book of Common Prayer* arrived with the first fleet in 1788 and remained in use long afterwards. Clergy and those members of the laity who worshipped according to its liturgy would have been dismayed had they been described as other than members of the 'Church of England'. But was the title fully deserved? Historians and others who have subsequently used the title do so in one of two ways. Either they employ it unthinkingly and without pausing to ask whether the title corresponded to reality or they answer the question obliquely without consciously appreciating what they have done. The question needs to be addressed frontally with a view to providing a comprehensive answer. Did those responsible for bringing the church to the Australian continent seek to create a duplicate of what they had known in England? Was it present in all its glory and with all its complexity or did it merely exist symbolically or in a more limited form? How might the Australian import have deviated from the English norm as a reflection of the practical and political soil in which it was planted? These questions persist throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. We should begin, then, by exploring

these issues in the period 1788–1821 which possessed features different to those that marked later decades.

The Church of England had been a national institution since the sixteenth century Reformation. It was not a private club but a vast religious corporation. The 'Established' Church provided the spiritual lifeblood for one of the world's greatest nations and the global empire that it built. In the antipodes, by way of contrast, it was contained in three small outposts situated at the eastern end of the Australian continent: one located on the mainland in a remote part of coastal New South Wales and the others far to the south across Bass Strait in Van Diemen's Land.¹ Although settled in 1803 to forestall a possible French occupation, the island later named 'Tasmania' rapidly became a key settlement for banished British convicts. The same was true of the mainland from 1788 although the reasons for colonisation there are the subject of continuing dispute among historians. These differences, and they are significant, centre on the importance of penal considerations as opposed to those of a commercial and strategic kind. But this one fact remains: until 1821 convicts formed the bulk of the population and this greatly affected the course of the colony's development.

Convicts were not, however, the sole determinant of what went on in eastern Australia. Outside the penal system there emerged a free community which introduced a strong dynamic into the settlement. From the outset official provision was made for migrants to settle alongside military and civil officers and visiting seafarers. The whole process gathered pace, particularly after the Napoleonic Wars when there was an influx of half-pay officers and others seeking refuge from adverse conditions in post-war Britain. Many showed a preference for Van Diemen's Land which resembled England in appearance and climate. But the bulk of free settlers came to the mainland. Those who brought capital to both regions acquired large landholdings on which they raised cattle and sheep, some also becoming businessmen and financiers. Migrants who had arrived as free settlers were to be found in practically every branch of enterprise as indeed were time-expired convicts many of whom capitalised on the colonial authority's decision to provide them with small farms. This generous decision was partly to augment the food supply but mainly to discourage them from returning home.

Small but thriving communities had emerged in both regions by 1821. Wool, together with the even more valuable products of the fishing industry, were being exported in growing quantities. Gradually a vibrant society

composed of free settlers and emancipists emerged outside the penal system. Land was readily available at little or no cost to the occupant and convicts provided the necessary labour force. Colonists who had come of their own volition dominated society although they were vastly outnumbered by those who had left their country for their country's good. Their presence was all pervasive and posed a unique challenge for the church.

The status of the Church

Such were the hybrid societies in which the Church of England found itself on the 'far side of the world' after 1788. But who was responsible for its presence? What purpose was it intended to serve? Elsewhere in the British empire the church owed its beginnings either to the missionary impulse or to the fact that it was part of the 'invisible baggage' that migrants carried with them. New South Wales, however, was the creation of the British government which accepted the need for the national church to be present in its formative years. In October 1786 a warrant was issued appointing a Church of England chaplain to the settlement. He was to accompany the First Fleet and serve in the colony. It is unlikely that the warrant was signed with any great enthusiasm. Hard-pressed members of William Pitt the Younger's administration were more concerned with punishing criminals and banishing miscreants than saving their souls. Nevertheless, parliamentarians recognised that the church might fill a useful role in a settlement composed of law-breakers who required discipline and higher moral standards.

Those with responsibility for directing church affairs in England played little part in this decision. The bishops thought of the church in national rather than imperial terms and made no plans for its overseas expansion which had already taken place somewhat haphazardly. Not until 1784 was the first bishop consecrated for the Episcopal Church in the long-established American colonies although this was an act carried out by the Scottish and not the English church. The settlements in eastern Australia had to wait until the 1830s before a bishop was consecrated to lead their church and its growing mission. In the meantime, those in New South Wales owed spiritual allegiance first to the Bishop of London and then, from 1814, to the newly established Diocese of Calcutta. Thomas Middleton, the first Bishop of Calcutta, was no better placed, however, to direct the antipodean clergy than had been the Bishop of London.² Both men were located far away and were too preoccupied with domestic issues to devote

much attention to the new colonies. In any event, they knew very little about them and never visited. Correspondence passed between bishops and the missionary clergy. But the exchange was mostly of a general kind and was of little serious consequence to the life of the colonial church.

Nor was the legal status of the church entirely clear. Here we come to the question of whether the colonial church, like its parent body, was formally 'Established'. A strong body of legal opinion, which included three judges, Sir William Burton, Sir James Dowling and JW Willis, claimed that it was. So, too, did the pro-government, conservatively inclined *Sydney Gazette*.³ Opposition came from non-conformists and Roman Catholics, opponents of the Established church in England and advocates of religious equality in the colonies. Archbishop Eris O'Brien, the scholarly Roman Catholic historian, cited two experts who argued that because the *Declaratory Acts*, necessary to determine the legal basis of the church in eastern Australia had not been passed, claims of 'Establishment' could not be sustained.⁴ Others argued that such Acts were unnecessary and that the privileges conferred on the church were in themselves proof of 'Establishment', a term which appeared in at least one official document.

Not open to dispute is the fact that no other branch of the Christian faith was officially sanctioned and financially supported until 1820 when Roman Catholic priests were permitted to administer to the Irish convicts and immigrants.⁵ Before that year only the Anglican Church was permitted to conduct Sunday worship and the services associated with the usual rites of passage. In addition, the church was dominant in the sphere of education, controlling the schools, determining the curriculum and providing religious instruction. That it enjoyed this monopoly was scarcely surprising. The activities of Roman Catholics and non-conformists in England were still circumscribed by legal restrictions dating from the sixteenth century Reformation when, throughout Europe, the security of each political realm was believed to rest most securely on the presence of only one branch of the Christian faith in each kingdom. This had become a less sensitive issue by the time eastern Australia was colonised but it did influence policy towards the two new settlements. The first Viceroy in New South Wales, Governor Arthur Phillip, was required to take an oath denying Roman Catholic teaching on the Eucharist.⁶ A blind eye could be turned to non-conformists because they were few in number and politically loyal in outlook. Roman Catholics fell into a different category. Quite apart from the strong anti-Catholic feelings that permeated English

society and helped define the parameters of national identity, there were also fears that a local priestly presence might foment unrest among the growing number of disaffected Irish convicts for whom transportation was yet another example of English injustice. They were regarded by the government as trouble-makers and their threatened revolt in 1800 and actual uprising at Castle Hill in 1803 confirmed this view, besides heaping coal on the fire of Irish resentment for the way in which those involved were treated. The English saw them as criminals; the Irish saw them as patriots. Priests were likely to stir further discontent. It was small wonder, then, that Roman Catholic clergy should have been proscribed, particularly as the two who were present as convicts from 1803 until 1805, and a third who arrived of his own volition in 1817, proved troublesome to the civil authorities.⁷ Their departure was greatly welcomed by the administration.

Church and Colonial Government

What existed in eastern Australia before 1821 was a church that was subject less to its parent body than to a succession of governors responsible to the Imperial authorities in London but not to the colonists in and beyond Sydney. Where they were closely concerned with local affairs, governors came close to being despots. This was the case elsewhere across the empire within the so-called 'Crown Colonies' where legislatures did not exist. But dictatorial rule was deemed more necessary in settlements composed largely of convicts who had forfeited their rights as British citizens. They could scarcely expect to have a voice in government. Nor, given their criminal background, could they be entrusted with this privilege after completing their sentences. It was discipline not freedom that was essential in shaping such a society. Settlers who arrived as free men and women had to accept autocracy in return for the largesse that was bestowed on them in the shape of land and labour. They came of their own free will to make fortunes and the price they paid was to exchange the rights they enjoyed in England for the restrictions imposed in the antipodes. Neither could they expect the blessings of a jury system when it came to trial in the law courts. Convicts and ex-convicts had disqualified themselves from jury service and there were too few migrants for them to be impanelled. Some minor changes did, however, lead to trials that resembled Courts Martial.

This was the framework in which the church found itself. Nothing could be less like that then prevailing in England. In eastern Australia the church was present partly to ensure that the penal system functioned

effectively. This meant it needed to come under the direct control of the governor. Clergy were appointed as chaplains to the military establishment and came under military discipline until 1814 when they received a civil commission.⁸ Their stipends were paid by the British treasury and they lacked the status of parish incumbent who had much greater security of tenure. Throughout their ministry they were at the beck and call of governors. Although successive occupants of the vice-regal office avoided involvement in questions of doctrine or issues of liturgy, in other respects they wielded considerable power over the clergy and maintained a close watch over their actions. The main point of official contact was through the Senior Chaplain, a position initially filled by Richard Johnson and then by Samuel Marsden.

Relations between church and governors varied, depending largely on the individuals concerned. Governor Phillip, although a product of the Enlightenment, was tolerant of the Reverend Richard Johnson. Despite being men of vastly different temperament, Phillip did what he could in the face of straitened circumstances to help Johnson. His temporary successor, Lieutenant-Governor Francis Grose, commandant of the ill-famed New South Wales Corps, took exception to Johnson on personal terms. He removed him from the bench of magistrates and refused to provide adequate funds for a church building. This mean-spirited attitude forced Johnson to turn to his own financial resources. Roman Catholic visitors who reached Sydney in March 1793 with the Spanish explorer, Alessandro Malaspina, were astonished to find that no church had yet been constructed.⁹

The situation changed after the arrival of Governor John Hunter in 1795. Hunter had contemplated ordination in the Church of Scotland before settling on a career in the Royal Navy.¹⁰ Although the call of the sea proved stronger, he remained a man of faith and diverted resources to the church and to ministry. Neither of his successors, Governors Philip King and William Bligh, could be described as men of religion. While King was supportive, Bligh's tenure was too short for him to do much for the church. The authoritarian Governor Lachlan Macquarie, a member of the Episcopalian Church of Scotland, made it clear that the church, like everything else in the colony, was subject to his will. Clashes inevitably ensued. The headstrong Senior Chaplain, Samuel Marsden, challenged the Governor's authority and this effectively soured relations between church and state.¹¹ Against this backdrop of personal animosity and the

fact that Macquarie had rarely worshipped on Sunday before coming to the colony, he supported the church financially, providing it with buildings of a standard never seen before. He set an example to the colonists by regularly attending church and encouraging its work.

Physical conditions

The subordination of church to state in eastern Australia set it apart from its parent body which experienced nothing like the gubernatorial interference experienced by the colonial clergy. Differences between the English and Australian churches were evident in other spheres as well. In England the church existed in a powerful, historic nation that was capable, as events between 1793 and 1815 showed, of defeating the burgeoning might of both Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Since the sixteenth century England had acquired an expanding empire and was accumulating financial wealth that none could rival. It led the world as an industrial urbanising nation that was rapidly turning away from its rural character and village lifestyle. Thanks to the replacement of domestic industry by the factory system, huge towns mushroomed in the north of England drawing population from the south. All the adornments of a highly civilised society with a glorious past and a rich culture were present in abundance.

What a contrast to the situation in eastern Australia where much could be fairly described as primitive. It is true that a private enterprise economy with some of the attributes of English society and culture did emerge. It was also the case that settlement expanded outwards. On the mainland it had reached the Blue Mountains to the east and was already moving in other directions by 1821. Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, had ceased to be the headquarters of a gaol and was transforming itself into a centre of trade, finance and business. Other townships had come into being to service the Parramatta region and the more distant Hawkesbury River and Cook's River districts. The countryside contained a mixture of smallholdings devoted to arable farming and large properties that were used for pastoral purposes by men who tried to emulate the English gentry in terms of their large houses and excessive life-style. Yet, this was all on a very small scale. It remained the case that whereas England was a highly developed nation, the antipodean colonies were pioneering societies still in their infancy and dependent on the convict presence.

The church found itself, then, in a frontier society. Its clergy were exposed to hardships of a kind not encountered at home. Travel, sometimes on foot, but more normally on horseback, was difficult and time-consuming. A road connected Sydney with Parramatta and Windsor but many settlers lived away from its course and clergy had to traverse bush tracks, negotiate rivers and cross creeks not as yet bridged. On Sundays they might have to travel for many miles in order to conduct worship. With the passage of time the situation improved, as did the conditions under which the clergy lived. They acquired more comfortable residences surrounded by land on which they raised livestock and crops. Some, like the entrepreneurial Samuel Marsden who was attached to his flock of sheep as well as his church flock, owned substantial property and lived in a manner resembling that of an English country gentleman. Yet, stipends were often inadequate and life was frequently difficult and demanding.¹² Clergy dwelt in unfamiliar surrounds where the seasons were back to front and the climate in summer was hot and dry. Winter was warmer than at home on the coastal fringe but spring and autumn were mere labels for seasons which did not resemble those of the northern hemisphere. Clergy had to brave the unfamiliar.

Lacking too were the magnificent church buildings that abounded in England. The first Anglican service was held on a hill overlooking Sydney harbour. Whether it took place on the first or second Sunday after the convicts landed was once the source of vigorous debate among historians. Whatever the case – the date hardly seems to matter much – the service was conducted in the open air under one (or possibly more) trees at the junction of present-day Hunter and Bligh Streets. This set the pattern for what subsequently occurred elsewhere in the colony as settlement spread. In the absence of church buildings, the clergy resorted to either open air services or to whatever suitably large buildings were available. Here, some wondered, was surely something associated more with the Methodist revival than with the Church of England. This custom was a consequence, however, not of any desire to imitate the Methodists but of a shortage of funds and the priorities of governors who found it necessary to give precedence to the material welfare of the settlers.

It is true, of course, that church buildings were constructed at Sydney and Parramatta. But these were naturally poor imitations of those in England.¹³ Sydney acquired its first church in August 1793, thanks largely to the efforts of the Reverend Richard Johnson. Capable of seating 500

worshippers it was a 'T' shaped structure of wattle and daub with a thatched roof and a dirt floor.¹⁴ Destroyed by fire in October 1798 it was not replaced until four years later when a stone building named St Philip's (possibly after the first governor) was opened. Parramatta had a church fashioned from two slab huts after 1796 until work was completed in 1803 on a more appropriate building. It was located in a central position and carried the Christian name of Governor John Hunter who had set the foundation stone.¹⁵

No churches were erected in the Hawkesbury River district until the arrival of Governor Macquarie in 1810. He set aside land for a church and parsonage in each of the five towns he established there but in only two did construction commence and even then not until late in his time as viceroy. The process began at Windsor in 1817 when work started on a church named not after a governor but after the apostle St Matthew. Progress was slow but was sufficient for the first service to be held in September 1821. Much the same held true of St Luke's Church at Liverpool where a building started in 1818 was available for a service to be held in December 1820.

From the architectural standpoint both churches represented an advance on those constructed earlier in Sydney and Parramatta. St Matthew's was large and imposing, Georgian in style and simple in structure. The windows and doors were 'round-topped' with a Norman appearance and there was a distinguishing feature in the shape of a 'pepper-pot' clock tower. Set on high ground the building overlooked the burgeoning township and the surrounding countryside. It had a dominating appearance which was symbolic of the way in which the Anglican church viewed itself. St Luke's was also of Georgian design and originally consisted of a rectangular nave, a square bell tower and a porch. At last, here were churches which bore comparison to those in England. But they were opened too late greatly to benefit worshippers before 1821. This was even more the case with the second church planned for Sydney, namely that of St James, which was located at the opposite end of the township to St Philip's. Like the others, it was designed by the convict architect Francis Greenway and formed part of Macquarie's grandiose plans to beautify Sydney. The foundation stone was laid in October 1819 but the church was not consecrated until February 1824.¹⁶