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VISION

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The Oasis of Macquarie Street



From the Minister's Desk

I don't know who dreamt it up, but I like it. The description of St Stephen's greets worshippers each Sunday, at the top of the order of service. "An Oasis of Christian Worship, Thought and Action", it says.

The image is a good one. Big or small, oases are wonderful things. They contrast with what is usually a pretty barren landscape. They are places of life and hope. Travellers shelter in them from the heat of the day, find strength and get their bearings for the journey ahead.

The thing about an oasis, of course, is that you never ask who built it or when. I can't imagine anyone celebrating the 75th anniversary of an oasis. You're just grateful that the place is there. And you're amazed that, somehow, life keeps welling up from secret depths and, miraculously, keeps it going.

Like every image of the church, this one has its flaws. Oases don't move, but St Stephen's has, a number of times since 1842. Oases don't change much, whereas churches do, constantly. And, importantly, an oasis is a *place*, while a church first and foremost is *people*.

Our world needs its spiritual oases. Numbers at worship may be down right across the secularized west. Yet there are more pilgrims than ever trekking Spain's ancient paths of faith, seeking a half-forgotten God. A hundred thousand youngsters each year flock to the Protestant monastic community of Taize, in France, looking for meaning amid the madness. Mortals, more than ever, crave holy places.

Sydney mortals included. A surprising number of people, of many faiths and of none, find their way past the scaffolding and into St Stephen's each day to look, to rest, to wonder, to pray and to recalibrate their lives.

For this very special oasis a 75th anniversary celebration is most definitely appropriate – with special attention to the divine source of its ongoing life.

David Gill

Editorial

Out of over 2000 years of Christian history, we celebrate 75 years of a building for worship on Macquarie Street. We remember with gratitude those who, with vision and industry founded this place ensuring that there has been no moment when Christ has been without his witnesses.

Much has been written and published about the early years and membership of the church since its inception, and long before the introduction of Sunday trading, flexi-time and numerous road closures on Sundays to accommodate sporting events. This edition focuses on recent events and activities especially after Church Union, with reflections and reports by / from past and present members.

What additional political, social and attitudinal changes will further affect our existence is something we leave in the hands of God.

Calendar of Events

25th June – Friday Music

Natalia Nicci (piano) and
Marianna Broadfoot (violin)

2nd July – Friday Music - Richard Pulley (violin)

9th July – Friday Music - Peter Smith (clarinet)

16th July – Friday Music - Vatche Jambazian
(piano)

23th July – Friday Music

Rajah Selvarajah (tenor)

25th July – Fellowship Winter Luncheon

30th July – Friday Music - Peter Guy (organ)

15th August – 10am Anniversary Service

11:30am – Launch of “**The**

**National Trust of Australia (NSW) St.
Stephen’s Uniting Church Macquarie Street
Sydney Conservation Appeal”.**

2:00pm – Hymnfest

4:00pm – High Tea

6th August – Friday Music

Sayaka Eguchi (violin & piano)

13th August – Friday Music

Cameron Burnes (bassoon)

20th August – Friday Music – Charisma

27th August – Friday Music – David Tagg
(St Stephen’s Organ Scholar)

Anniversaries – A Reflection

Anniversaries force us to reflect on the marvel of survival. We marvel that we have been part of the history of the universe.

Anniversaries make us wander through the many experiences of the past years.



As a church, we can ask ourselves:

Who were we a year ago? How have we grown? Are we more loving, more gracious, more compassionate than we were a year, a decade, seventy five years ago? What do we long for? What seems yet unfinished? Who and what have helped us on our *spiritual* journey? Or, are we living the parody,

“Like a mighty tortoise, moves the church of God-
Brothers we are treading as we’ve always trod”?

These challenging questions should help to energize us. We look at our place in the universe. We are so small and the cosmos is vast. As the psalmist wrote: “When I consider thy heavens,...

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

Or, as Eugene Peterson translates so refreshingly:

“I look up at your macro - skies...

Then I look at my micro - self and wonder,
Why do you bother with us?”

It calls us to examine whether we are active ingredients in the positive transformation of the world - wide church of God, of the earth, of the planet.

Gratitude must take up a large segment of our celebration.

For *what* do we give thanks? To *whom* do we give thanks?

Even during difficult and pain - filled years we have much for which to be grateful. This will lead us to our prayer of gratitude and trust in the Holy One’s mercy and kindness.

Who is this Holy One?

Joseph Hart’s familiar hymn explains:

“This, this is the God we adore;
Our faithful, unchangeable friend
Whose love is as great as His power,
And neither knows measure nor end.

‘Tis Jesus – the first and the last
whose spirit shall guide us safe home.
We’ll praise Him for all that is past,
and trust him for all that’s to come”

Ruth Ponniab

A Day of Celebration at St. Stephen's

Many people visit St. Stephen's each week. People from overseas and all over Australia comment on the beauty of the sanctuary.

The atmosphere of the building invites them to come in and pray or meditate. Our mission is to be **"An oasis of Christian Worship, Thought and Action."** This is what many people in this city of Sydney seek.

This is the 75th year that the building has stood at 197, Macquarie Street. There will be a Service of Thanksgiving for the 75 years on 15th August at 10.00am. Over the years, St. Stephen's has been well known for its music and its hymns, and the Day of Celebration will include a Hymnfest at 2.00pm.



Unfortunately, over the years, acid rain, exhaust fumes and other pollutants have caused our facades to deteriorate and become a safety issue. Extensive conservation work is needed on the sandstone and the roof where there is moisture penetration, deterioration in some of the stained glass of the windows and erosion in the metal frames. In addition, our present exits do not comply with modern safety standards and disability access. All the conservation work now totals an estimated minimum of two million dollars.

Because St. Stephen's is a Heritage Building, the National trust has given approval for a Conservation Appeal to be established to help with fund raising for the restoration of the building. This appeal is titled **"The National Trust of Australia (NSW) St. Stephen's Uniting Church Macquarie Street Sydney Conservation Appeal"**.

Donations of \$2.00 and upwards are tax deductible.

On 15 August this Appeal will be launched immediately after the Morning Worship. All Members and Friends are invited to attend all or some of the events that day.

Bernice Stewart

Chairperson, Church Council.

EARLY DAYS OF ST. STEPHEN'S

Recalling events which occurred 75 years ago is not easy, but special moments remain in my memory, in particular, the first service in Macquarie Street, conducted by the Rev. James McLeod in March 1935. I would have been 12 years at this time and lived in Waverton with my parents.

From the time I was 8 years old I attended morning service at St Stephen's, Phillip Street as my mother was a member of the choir. Unfortunately, this lovely church was placed under a demolition order by the City Council as Martin Place was to be extended through to Macquarie Street. The elegant colonial "Burdekin House" was somehow involved in this project, and before its demolition, the members of the Guild were invited to an afternoon tea to say good bye. The Burdekin site was purchased, and the building of St. Stephen's commenced.

In my mind, it did not seem to take long before its completion. The old spire, stained glass windows and memorial plaques were incorporated in the new church. We were proud of my father's cousin, Finlay Munro, Jnr who was one of the architects of the Macquarie St. church.

On the day of the opening service, we were advised to be in our pews well before the appointed hour as a tremendous number of worshippers was anticipated. The seating capacity was for 1,000, and well over that number attended. All available space was occupied. I recall a gentleman dressed in a white suit, sitting on the stairs leading to the pulpit. I was told later that it was the Rev. John Flynn of the Flying Doctor service.

I grew up in the church, joining in the Fellowship, meeting my relatives and friends each Sunday, taking part in the women's activities and being married in the church before leaving Sydney for Orange in 1947. Thank you for letting me share these thoughts with you.

Marjorie Rowlands



News from the Organ Bench

Mark Quarmby
(Director of Music).

Our next big musical event at St Stephen's will be the much loved Hymn Fest. This year it will be held at 2pm on Sunday 15th August. We are very excited to be welcoming the Director of Music from the BBC's "Songs of Praise", Dr Gordon Stewart, to be our musical director for the event. We will be welcoming back our brass quintet and Anthony's excellent choir "Bel a Capella" will be coming to help lead the singing, along with our own choir, and to provide a couple of anthems.

Please put this date in your diary now and invite all your friends so that we can fill the church with wonderful hymn singing.

Over the past month I have rebuilt the St Stephen's web site. Please check it out at www.ssms.org.au and you will now find details of the Music List for our Sunday services, all the Friday Music performers and their programs, and any other news, photos and information I am given to upload.

Over the past few weeks we have had more repairs done on the organ for which I am most grateful. The organ is over 75 years old and the original leather parts have perished. One can only put patches on patches for so long... Over the years, for one reason or another, many pipes have gone missing. Some were taken out to be replaced by newer ones but this never occurred and so holes in the organ's specification were left.

We have been most fortunate to obtain some second hand pipes from Melbourne to start replacing those which were removed and lost. We now have our "heavenly voices" stop working again after 40 years! The organ had two of these stops, one on each side of the building. At least we have one again now, one of the most important tones colours on a romantic instrument. We have also reconnected the lowest octave of pipes after finding them disconnected for 40 years. Again this has added a whole new dimension to the instrument. There is much more work to be done (eg the Clarinet stop is completely missing and the bottom 12 pipes of the Trumpet stop are missing). Any donations for the organ's restoration can be made through the Music Foundation and achieve tax deductibility status.



Youth Matters

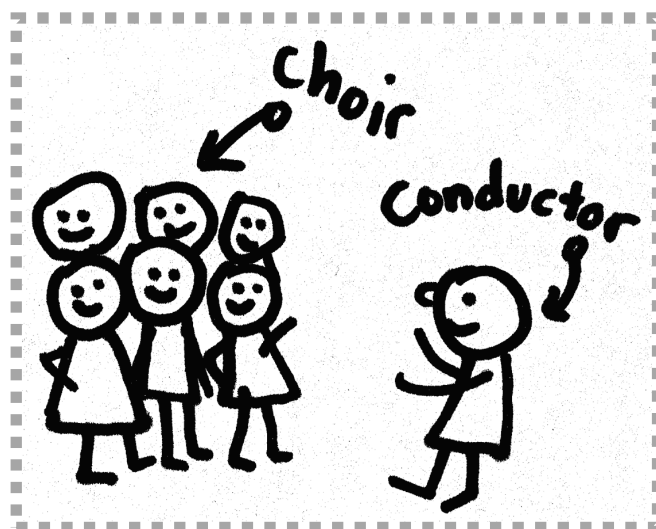
Bronwyn Thompson

One of the most exciting moments in the recent musical life of St Stephen's was the formation of the St Stephen's Junior Choir.

For six weeks, a group of young budding singers and musicians met on a Sunday afternoon to choose, learn and perfect music for inclusion at Afternoon Devotions.

All participants were wonderfully enthusiastic about the project, and I had a huge amount of fun facilitating it. We ran the gamut of musical genres – from English church music to Maori waite – which certainly provided somewhat of a challenge for the Rev. Jack, whose job it was to extract a suitable theme on which to base his reflection! The theme he decided on was 'Times of Celebration', and certainly, the occasion, though only small in attendance, felt very much like a celebration. It was the culmination of much time and work by all involved, and suitably demonstrated what beautiful things can be achieved with limited resources.

The Afternoon Devotions proved to be a new experience for several members of the choir, but all took it in their stride and performed the songs with ease and confidence, and our nine-year-old organist carried off his part with aplomb.



PARISHIONER'S REMINISCENCES

OLYMPICS NOSTALGIA

Sydney, 1998. An auspicious year! The Olympics were to be held in two years' time. St. Stephen's Uniting Church, located at the centre of historic Macquarie Street, had a new minister- The Rev. Bruce Walker. He was appointed because of his new ideas and fresh approach for an inner city church. He and his wife Delia were strong advocates for broadening the activities of the congregation so that St. Stephen's might be a more faithful witness to the love of God in the heart of Sydney. Therefore, early in 1998, Bruce called a meeting of several church members to speak of the need to conduct activities in the church during the Olympics. I was appointed chairperson of the committee which included Bernice Stewart, a long time member of the congregation and Carolyn Benn who was actively involved with the musical life of Sydney.

One Sunday morning I announced our tentative plans and called for volunteers. The response was great. Two people in particular, Martha and Jean Herbison, come to mind because at the time, they were in their late eighties. They volunteered to make scones for the 'Open House' that would be held during the Olympics.

Several Sundays later, Cara Horscroft, with four of her friends, officially opened the "Participation of St. Stephen's in the Olympics" with a modern dance routine using 5 colourful hoops –symbols of the Olympics. This was the first time that a dance had been performed in the sanctuary!

In the autumn of 2000, the congregation voiced their concern for many low income people who were being evicted so that the landlords could let rooms for a higher rent. We decided to raise money to subsidise some of the cost to enable people to stay in their homes. The 70-voice Sydney Welsh Choir, a jazz band of high school students, "The Gate of Salvation", well known for their a cappella singing performed in concerts to a packed church in May, June and July respectively. We made \$6,000 after all expenses were paid. The church was also able to publicise activities at St. Stephen's on banners across the freeway.

During the Olympics, there was "Open House" daily at the church from 9am to 3pm. We served pumpkin scones, sandwiches, damper, and lamingtons along with tea and coffee. Hundreds of visitors stopped for a 'cuppa'.

During crowded lunch times, there were piano and organ recitals. Sometimes, small groups, including a Salvation Army Trio played on the steps of the church to encourage people to visit and worship in the sanctuary. Members conducted tours of the building. Items produced by the Handcraft group under the direction of Margaret De La Garde were on sale. A popular item was the card created with photos taken by Ruth Waugh, featuring the yellow "Olympic Rose".

One of the most exciting events at St. Stephen's was the attendance of Olympic Gold medallist, Betty Cuthbert. She gave a moving testimony of her faith in Christ before, during, and after her days within the Olympic community. This event attracted significant coverage by the local media.

The Rev. Bruce Walker incorporated different Olympic themes into his message of the Good News at each Sunday and Wednesday service.

All in all, the weeks before the 2000 Olympics were busy but very satisfying. Many people became involved in the numerous activities, including planning events, creating programmes, baking, or meeting and greeting people.

The theme that all the churches had adopted was "More than Gold" signifying that there was something more to be had in life than gold medals – belief in Jesus Christ. The whole of the church community at Stephen's came together and endeavoured to reflect that theme.

Faith Jones

(Past member)

California

WORLD YOUTH DAY AND ST. STEPHEN'S

When the Catholic Church in Sydney commenced its planning for World Youth Day, 2008, letters were sent to churches of other denominations, in particular, the city churches, requesting help for the occasion. On the recommendation of Dr. Jack, St. Stephen's Church Council made the offer of the premises- an offer which was readily and gratefully accepted. As a result, during the months of May and June, rehearsals were held several times a week in the Ferguson Hall for the re-enactment of the Stations of the Cross which was to take place in the presence of the Pope on Saturday, 20th July.



Three catechesis sessions were held in the sanctuary on 16th, 17th and 18th July from 9am-12pm. Two huge screens were set up and a rock band accompanied the enthusiastic singing, particularly of the anthem, *Receive the Power*, written for the occasion by Guy Sebastian. Between 700-800 young people from all over the world attended the two-hour learning sessions each day on the theme of **The Holy Spirit and Mission** at the end of which the bishops and cardinals arrived to lead the Mass. These 3 days proved to be a very rewarding experience for those of us in attendance. It was uplifting to see so many happy and enthusiastic young people witnessing to their faith.

The organizers were very grateful for the help they received.

You

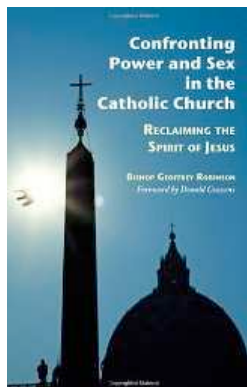
BOOK DISCUSSION

Alex Norquay introduced Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book entitled **Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church** to the Mission Committee. Dr. Jack realized that the interest for us lay in the sub-title, *Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*.

The book divided into fairly autonomous sections, lending itself to a series of about 7 discussions. The fact that these were held during World Youth Day was coincidental.

They were timed so as to end on the day that could accommodate Bishop Robinson's presence with us.

Although St. Stephen's was not very well represented, it was heartening to see and hear people from other churches.



Many other projects emanated from the Mission Committee. One of them was the Justice Forum in 2006. It arose out of a general discussion on outreach programmes by attracting people in this area of the city after work. These bi-monthly forums began with our own Justice Rex Smart who spoke on Civil justice. Keith Suter spoke on International justice; Justice Eric Baker, on the family Court; Chris Lemmings, on Juvenile justice, and, during the launch of Lent Event, a visiting minister from India, Rev. Jacob Belly spoke about justice (or the lack of it) among the forest people.

Two of the projects proposed in Rev. Dr Jack's *Renaissance Document* were the upgrading of the front vestibule and the establishment of a Resource Room in the front vestry. As a result the plain white ceiling which featured some attractive mouldings was re-painted in heritage colours of red, green and stone. Thanks to the Handcraft Group a plasma screen was erected to publicise services and events.

The front vestry was also painted in heritage red to transform the room into a warm and attractive meeting room and work space. The entrance to the church continues to elicit many admiring comments from visitors.

WHAT ATTRACTED / BROUGHT YOU TO ST STEPHEN'S

Some responses from members

- *Family connections / history with the church*
- *To join the choir / came here for Messiah practices*
- *For baptisms / weddings*
- *The quality of the musical and liturgical practice*
- *Friday Music concerts*



Janice Dawson

My involvement in the life of St Stephen's has not been a regular or conventional one. I first began attending services when I moved to Sydney in the late 60's from Brisbane. However, in 1970 I went to live in France and the UK for four years. During the Rev. Graham Hardy's ministry I renewed my ties. After the departure of the Hardys, I left the church for a number of years because of commitment to my career. After I retired in 2000 I experienced again a desire to make some kind of a contribution to the life of the church.

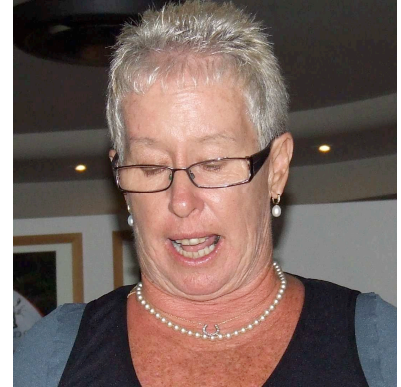
One of my strongest memories of the past involves the 'Singles and Doubles Group' which was a dynamic part of the church. Most members were in their late 20s and 40s. I can recall so many wonderful times of fellowship as well as enjoyable outings. Some activities included study nights, dinners in one another's homes, visits to the theatre or cinema and there was a strong bond of friendship between us.



Margaret Horscroft

My family has been involved in the life of St. Stephen's since 1975. We had moved back to the Eastern Suburbs from the Sutherland Shire and my twin sister Judith and I wanted to go to a Church in the inner city. We chose St Stephen's as we felt that the Church placed a strong emphasis on fellowship and offered a high standard of traditional ministry and music. One interesting memory from the past is that on many occasions, my sister Judith used to share an early morning swim at Neilson Park with the then Minister Graham Hardy.

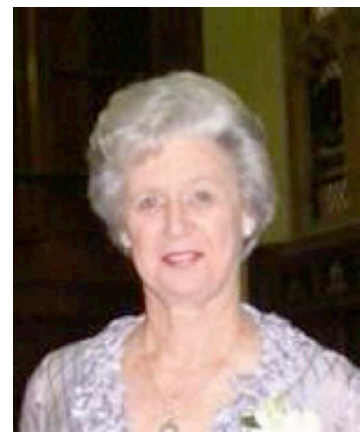
My sister and I have also shared and continue to share Sunday service with our wonderful mother, Mollie. We have many happy memories of special people and events at St. Stephen's, and Mollie, Judith and I continue to enjoy very much our involvement in the Church to-day.



Margaret Warden

It seems to me that talk of St Stephen's has always permeated my existence, as this particular Church has played a very important part in my life, due to a certain extent to my heritage - a great-grandfather, Rev. John Ferguson was Minister of St Stephen's for thirty-one years when it was in Phillip Street; a grandfather, Sir John Ferguson was an Elder for fifty-seven years; a grandmother, Bessie Ferguson was involved with St Stephen's Dorcas Society for some thirty years; a father, Bruce Ferguson was an Elder for some twenty-five years; a mother, Jean Ferguson was elected a Life Member of the Fellowship after many years of service; and brothers John and Malcolm, one who entered the Ministry and the other who became an Elder, as well as numerous other relatives involved in the Church in the past. My grandfather married in St Stephen's, as did my parents, my husband and I, and my son and his wife. All this has given the Ferguson family a continuous link with St Stephen's from 1894 to the present day.

Memories of the years during which I have been associated with St. Stephen's abound. One which comes readily to mind is that of a very full Church for the induction of Rev. Gordon Powell and his sparkling wife, Gwen and I became a communicant member of St Stephen's. In subsequent years, I was one of a large group of young adults who met in the Ferguson Hall at 5pm each Sunday, had a quick bite to eat and then literally swarmed en masse into the Church for the evening service. There were naturally romances within this group (called in those days "The Fellowship" – not to be confused with our present Fellowship Group) and these resulted in the exodus of young married couples who opted for suburban churches after the arrival of children. I remember also the significant number of children who attended Sunday School in the Ferguson Hall, with the most memorable period for me being the 1980s when my son was small and Rosalie Ramsay was Sunday School Superintendent. During those years when regular church attendance was an important part of the life, St. Stephen's welcomed numerous visiting preachers from Britain and North America. There were also visits from important personages, including past Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth with H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Anne, Yehudi Menuhin and Dame Flora McLeod.



ST. STEPHEN'S FELLOWSHIP

The *St. Stephen's Fellowship* as we know it today had its genesis in The St. Stephen's Dorcas Society, probably as early as 1872.

Mrs. Jean Ferguson, in her booklet, "A short History of St. Stephen's Dorcas Society" states that the objectives of the society were "to relieve the deserving poor by gifts of clothing and small donations of money, and to send occasional gifts of clothing for distribution at the mission stations in the New Hebrides Islands."

Meetings were always held on the first Wednesday of each month. Parcels were sent to the Sydney City Mission, Burnside Homes, the New Hebrides mission, the Red Cross, the Australian Inland Mission, just to name a few.

The first Dorcas meeting at the current location was held on 3rd April, 1935, in the Ferguson Hall named in memory of Rev. John Ferguson and his daughter-in-law, Bessie who succeeded her mother-in-law as President.

With the arrival of Mrs. Gwen Powell and her husband, Rev. Gordon Powell in 1952, membership increased rapidly, reaching its zenith in 1964 following the highly successful Billy Graham Crusade, with 375 members – more than the present membership of the church. Following Church Union in 1977, the name of the society was changed to St. Stephen's Uniting Dorcas Fellowship, subsequently known as St. Stephen's Fellowship. Meetings are still held on the first Wednesday of the month at 10.30 am, with a presentation from an interesting speaker thereafter, and a light lunch.

The Fellowship in conjunction with the Handcraft Group holds two street stalls each year. Contributions for these stalls and any assistance on the day are always welcome.

The Fellowship organises a Winter Luncheon each year and the profits from this go to Frontier Services. Members of other city churches are invited to the annual Christmas Party and it is good to meet, greet and enjoy the company of members of other denominations.

As the social fabric and lifestyles, and working conditions and hours in Sydney have changed, it has been increasingly difficult to attract new people into the church in spite of brilliant preachers. Although the present membership is small, the Fellowship is a lively group intent on providing assistance where it is needed. The main beneficiaries of monetary and material gifts are Frontier Services and Uniting Care.

The current office bearers are: President – Margaret De La Garde;
Secretary – Margaret Warden; and Treasurer – Bernice Stewart.

New members are very welcome, and anyone wishing to join can contact one of the office bearers. Annual subscription is only \$10.00

Margaret Warden



VALE MARTHA McMILLAN HERBISON 1910-2010

A few months short of her 100th birthday, the highly regarded Martha Herbison has died. A group of six St Stephens-ites supported her farewell service at Macquarie Park Crematorium and were delighted to find that Martha had so many young nieces and nephews, for whom she had obviously been a special person. Bob Hinds, her Elder, spoke of her link with the Christian church, and her long association with us since the early 1980s.

The Herbisons were Scots who migrated to Sydney in the early 1920s – but three weeks after their arrival, Martha's father passed away suddenly, and the family of seven had to establish itself without him.

Martha left Petersham High School with her Intermediate Certificate, tackled a Business College Course and entered the workforce. Her first job was with W R Carpenters, the islands trading company; after fifteen years she left to enlist in the Navy for World War II, where she played such a valuable role that she was invited, after demobilization, to enlist in the Naval Reserve.

In 1952, she joined the staff of The Land Newspaper, where she was Secretary to the head of the organization. She was highly valued and on retiring after thirty years the firm gave her a return trip to London, via Israel and several other points of interest.

In her closing years she endured her shrinking quality of life with Christian fortitude. At her Funeral Service, two cogent lines (from St Francis) spoke to us all -

“To wait the unfolding of Your will patiently, serenely,
To face tomorrow confidently, courageously.”

Alex N

WHO'S WHO AT ST STEPHEN'S

The current "Who's Who at St Stephen's" was originally issued in 2007. Obviously there have been a number of changes since, as I discovered when I was consulting it recently.

If you would like to be included in an updated directory could you please complete the enclosed insert and send it back to the church by either:

Leaving the completed form at the Church office
Mailing the completed form to the Church

Or for those technically advanced people, you can email your details directly to me at grallan@bigpond.com

I will allow a month for all the information to come in and then it will be compiled into a new document available for issue to all the participants. I will also include an up to date listing of the contacts for the various groups and activities.

Thanks for your help.

Geoff Allan
Resource Room

Details for inclusion in "Who's Who at St Stephen's"

NAME: _____

ADDRESS : (include the details you think
are appropriate for you)

HOME: _____

WORK: _____

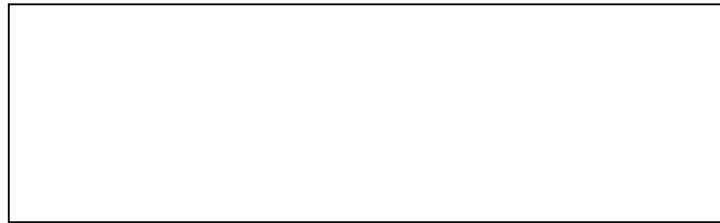
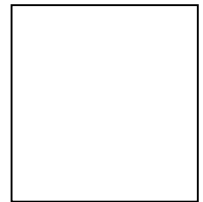
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If not claimed please return to:
St Stephen's Uniting Church
197 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vision welcomes ideas, suggestions, original verse and prose, book, film and play reviews, humour, concerts you can recommend. Please send your letters by mail (197 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000), fax (02-9230 0316), or email (office@ssms.org.au), or drop them at the office.