

**FIFTY YEARS
OF
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH
IN
SINGAPORE ISLAND
1909—1959**

By

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Number Four: Singapore Studies on Borneo and Malaya



Published by The Department of History
University of Singapore
1963

70788

PREFACE

It is the conviction that just as the history of the economic enterprise, the social conditions and the political changes of the country are each important to the understanding of the history of Singapore, so also is the history of the Church. Whatever the official creed of the nation is, the Church is here to stay. Her part in educating the people is well-known and recognised. But not her history. It is therefore hoped that this small attempt would fill a few gaps.

However, within the compass of this exercise it is not possible to give the history of the Church, nor even that of one of its parts — the Anglican Church.

Two reasons dictated the choice to write on Singapore Island. First, it is the biggest parish, and the Cathedral Church as well, of the Anglican Church in the country. Second, it is the only parish that has, despite the War, most of its records intact.

I would like to thank the heads of the various institutions of the Anglican Church in Singapore for allowing me access to whatever records they have, especially the Diocesan Secretary. I am also grateful to Dr. G. Keys Smith (formerly Medical-officer-in-charge of the St. Andrew's Mission Hospital) for helpful comments on Chapter V; to the Venerable Dr. D. D. Chelliah, Archdeacon of Singapore, for reading through Chapters III and IV, and to Dr. E. Thio for general advice.

L. K. A.

Singapore.
December 1960.

MV 41.2
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ABBREVIATIONS

Con. Min.	Diocesan Council of Malaya, Minutes.
D.A.C.E.	Diocesan Advisory Council on Education, Minutes.
S.A.M.H. Board Min.	St. Andrew's Mission Hospital, Board of Management, Minutes.
S.A.M.H. report.	St. Andrew's Mission Hospital Annual Report.
S.A.S. Board.	St. Andrew's School, Board of Governors, Minutes.
S.D.A. Annual.	Singapore Diocesan Association Annual Report.
S.D.M.	Singapore Diocesan Magazine.
S.H.S. Board.	St. Hilda's School, Board of Management, Minutes.
S.M.S. Board.	St. Margaret's School, Board of Management, Minutes.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WORK PRIOR TO 1909

Anglican work officially started in Singapore island in 1826 with the appointment of the Rev. Robert Burns as Chaplain by the East India Company in Bengal.¹ The Residency having been established the same year, it was perhaps thought necessary to include among the Civil Establishment, a full-time Chaplain. Prior to this date, the few members of the Church of England were ministered to by chaplains of the Company's ships, whenever such ships that called carried chaplains.²

A succession of chaplains followed until 1868, a year after the Straits Settlements were transferred to the Colonial Office, when the first Colonial Chaplain, the Rev. John Beckles was appointed.³

During this first period of forty-two years, two important events took place in the Anglican Church in Singapore island. The first was in 1834 when during the first visit of Bishop (and Metropolitan) Daniel Wilson of Calcutta,⁴ a committee which had been formed under the second Residency Chaplain, discussed with him the plans for building a church on the site already given by the government.⁵ On the spot collections were taken for the church building fund; the acting Governor (Bonham) promised to urge the Supreme Government to grant aid. This meeting took place on October 6, and on November 9 of the same year, the foundation stone was laid, with a service by the Chaplain.⁶

The church was completed in 1837⁷ and the first service held on June 18, by the Rev. Edward White (third Residency Chaplain) and it was consecrated by Bishop Wilson on his second visit, on

1. S.D.M. No. 69. Feb. 1928, p. 10.

2. In 1823, the Rev. J. Milton of the London Missionary Society was paid \$150/- by Raffles to perform the usual services. The L.M.S. being a non-conformist Society, the services were not according the Church of England Prayer Book.

3. Swindell, F. G.: *A Short History of S. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore*. Singapore 1929. p. 5.

4. His See then included the whole of the Far East and Australasia.

5. Buckley, C. B.: *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*. Singapore. 1902. Vol. I. p. 286. The site was given in 1824 and bounded (today) by St. Andrew's, Stamford, North Bridge Roads and Coleman Street.

6. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 287-289. G. D. Coleman's design was accepted.

7. Before the church was built, services were conducted by the Residency chaplains in the L.M.S. Mission Chapel which stood at the junction of (the present) Bras Basah and North Bridge roads. The government paid a rent of \$20/- monthly for this.

September 10, 1838. A tower and spire were added in 1842 to distinguish it from other buildings.⁸

However, the building was not in use for long. It was struck by lightning in 1845 and again in 1849, and being unsafe was closed down in 1852. A new church was erected on the same site after some agitation by the residents of the town, and Bengal voted a sum of Rs. 47,000 for it. The foundation stone of this new church was laid by Bishop Wilson on March 4, 1856, during his fifth and last visit to the Settlements.⁹ It was built by convict labour under Major McNair, in lieu of the government grant, and the architect was Captain Ronald Macpherson.¹⁰

The original church had been named St. Andrew's Church, for according to Buckley, there were "...so many Scotsmen among the subscribers..."¹¹ The new church retained its old name and was made into a Cathedral on December 20, 1870, by Bishop Chambers,¹² who was consecrated Bishop of "Labuan and Sarawak" in 1869 and to whose See was transferred the Straits Settlements (and the Malay Peninsula).¹³ This church had been consecrated by Bishop Cotton on January 25, 1862.¹⁴

The second important event took place on Whitsunday 1856 whilst the church was still under construction. The Residency Chaplain, William Humphrey, preached a stirring sermon to his congregation which so roused them that the St. Andrew's Church Mission was launched. The principal object was to evangelise the Asians in Singapore. Work began in October with Peter Tychicus, a Tamil, as catechist, and later a Chinese catechist was also engaged. The result was not very encouraging for there were about forty members after six years' work.

An ordained man was necessary if the work was to develop. S.P.G.¹⁵ was appealed to, and it sent out the Rev. Edward Venn in January 1862, as Superintendent of the Mission. He had four catechists under him, and the work showed some improvement. One of the catechists, Chok Loi Fatt, was largely responsible for the founding of a school.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Venn could only put in four years' work as he died in September 1866.¹⁷

8. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 289.

9. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 292-294.

10. With the use of convict labour, the building was estimated to cost Rs. 47,916. The original church was estimated to cost \$10,000/- mostly raised by private individuals as there was no record of government aid.

11. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 288.

12. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 299.

13. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 404.

14. Buckley: *Anecdotal History*. p. 296.

15. Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign Parts. founded 1701.

16. Later known as St. Andrew's School. See Chapter IV.

17. S.D.M. No. 74, May 1929, p. 21-22. An Article by Rev. R. Richards.

The Mission then went through a most difficult period. It being in debt, all the catechists except Loi Fatt were dismissed. The Colonial Chaplain took over supervision from 1868, and funds were raised to pay off the debt. Tychicus was re-engaged. The work continued thus without much progress until 1872, when the Rev. William Henry Gomes, a Ceylonese who had worked in Borneo and Malacca, and who was also a linguist, was sent by the S.P.G. to be Superintendent of the Mission, on the condition that the Mission paid the salaries of the catechists and met all the current expenditure.¹⁸

Under Gomes the work expanded, thus justifying the move to have a full-time and well qualified missionary to direct the Mission. Houses were rented for the Mission and the school. In October 1873, the government granted land¹⁹ to the Mission for buildings, and on February 14, 1875, the Mission Chapel was opened for services. The school was also held during week-days in the building. Work also extended to Jurong in 1876, and in 1884 the Church of St. John there was consecrated by Bishop Hose. Three services were held, in Hokkien, Tamil and Malay. Gomes held the post until his death in March 1902.²⁰

What little advance the Anglican Church in Malaya made during the first hundred years of its history — i.e. from 1805 when the first chaplain was appointed to Penang,²¹ to 1909 when the bishopric of Singapore was created²² — was directly the result of episcopal supervision. Up to 1869, the Church was under the jurisdiction of Calcutta.²³ The Bishops could not possibly devote as much time as they would like to their enormous diocese. Being appointed to Calcutta and stationed there, their main concern was naturally India itself.²⁴

The very little that was done in the field of missionary activities must be accounted for by the fact that the Residency chaplaincies which were filled by the Company were not secure.²⁵ In Singapore

18. S.D.M. No. 74, May 1929. p. 22.

19. The land bounded by (the present) Stamford Road, Armenian Street, Canning Rise.

20. S.D.M. No. 74, May 1929. p. 22. Gomes translated The Common Prayer Book into Hokkien, and part of the Bible into Malay.

21. S.D.M. No. 48. Nov. 1922. p. 2.

22. Certificate of Consecration of Charles James Ferguson-Davie. see Appendix I.

23. Swindell: *Short History*. p. 1. In 1813 when the Charter of the Company was renewed a Bill establishing the bishopric of Calcutta was got through the House of Commons with difficulty. It was only in 1833 that other Sees in India were created.

24. The first bishop, Thomas Fanshawe Middleton consecrated St. George's Church in May 1819. The fifth bishop Daniel Wilson paid five visits to the Straits Settlements. The next bishop, Edward Cotton dedicated St. Andrew's Church, Singapore, on January 25, 1862.

25. Residency chaplaincies were not filled by the bishop; and there was also no pension attached.

we saw that the St. Andrew's Church Mission was launched through the inspiration of a chaplain and not planned by Calcutta.²⁶ Similarly in Penang, expediency and the foresight of the chaplain, the Rev. Robert Hutchings, was instrumental in the founding of a school there.²⁷

After the establishment of the Colonial chaplaincies in 1869, with the transfer of the Straits Settlements to Bishop Chambers' See of "Labuan and Sarawak", there was more episcopal control and guidance. Bishop Chambers spent a few months of the year in the Straits²⁸ making St. Andrew's Church, Singapore, his Cathedral church. There was some advance. In Singapore the St. Andrew's Church Mission under Gomes slowly progressed. In Province Wellesley, a church mission was started with the Bishop's approval²⁹ and in Penang, the Tamil Mission began in 1871.³⁰

This continued until 1881 when George Frederick Hose became Bishop of "Singapore, Labuan and Sarawak."³¹ The title was significant. The Peninsula had assumed greater importance in the eyes of British statesmen and traders³² and so also in the eyes of the Church. Bishop Hose spent half the year in the Singapore part of his Diocese.³³

In Singapore island itself the church and its mission work steadily expanded, whilst in the Peninsula, the Taiping Chaplaincy was founded in 1884, and a church built in 1887.³⁴ Similarly churches were built in Kuala Lumpur in 1887 and in Seremban in 1893.³⁵ In Penang the St. George's Church Chinese mission was founded in 1886.³⁶

As Bishop Hose spent the best part of the year in the Peninsula, the work in Labuan and Sarawak consequently suffered a set back. The unwieldy Diocese in those days of difficult travelling could not be adequately supervised by one bishop.³⁷ It was clear that a separation of the Diocese was essential if the work of the Church

26. see p. 2.

27. St. George's Herald. May, 1959. p. 8. The Penang Free School, the first English School in Malaya was opened on October 21, 1816.

28. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. S.P.C.K. London. 1951. p. 404.

29. Letter of Bishop Chambers to David Brown dated June 18, 1878, on the formation of the Province Wellesley Mission Institution.

30. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 404.

31. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 405. S.D.M. No. 46. May, 1922. p. 5.

32. After the British intervention in the Malay states which step was dictated by commercial and political considerations, there was an increase of British traders there and the Church had to minister to them. see p. 5.

33. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 405.

34. S.D.M. No. 11. May, 1913. p. 7.

35. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 405. S.D.M. No. 12. August 1913, p. 4.

36. Letter of Appeal of St. George's Church Chinese Mission. June 1940.

37. Makepeace, W., Brooke, G. E., Braddell, St. J. R.: *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. John Murray, London. 1921. Vol. II. p. 239.

was not to suffer in both parts of the joint Diocese. This was duly accomplished when in 1908 on the retirement of Bishop Hose, Bishop Mounsey was consecrated as Bishop of "Labuan and Sarawak" only,³⁸ and in 1909 Charles James Ferguson-Davie was consecrated to the new See of Singapore.³⁹

Another reason for the little advance during the first hundred years was the fact that the Church followed the British flag. We saw that the first Residency chaplains were appointed in 1826 i.e. when the political status of the three Settlements was somewhat settled. The next step was in 1869, again after another political step — the Colony of the Straits Settlements — had been taken.

In the Peninsula, although the British had intervened in 1874, no church was established till 1884, in Taiping, to work among the Chinese. No missionary work among the Moslem Malays was considered; and their faith always has been respected. During the first years, the British position in the Malay states was not so secure. It was only after the second stage of advance under Frederick Weld, from 1881, that Britain was firmly established in the Peninsula. This meant more British commercial enterprises were established there with more Europeans and so the Church had to minister to them.

The appointment of a new bishop also coincided with this stage of the British intervention, and cognisance was taken of the importance of the Peninsula when Bishop Hose's See was entitled "Singapore, Labuan and Sarawak". Without a bishop of its own the Anglican Church in the Peninsula followed far behind the British flag. The inauguration of the Federation in 1896 saw no similar advance taken by the Church.

The underlying factor — the chief concern in fact — was first to minister to the Europeans, and only secondly to evangelise the Asians. This contrasted with Hongkong where the evangelising of China was the main concern of the Church, and where after only six years' missionary work, a bishopric was created. Also in Borneo where although missionary work began only in 1848, a See was created within seven years (1855). But again, no Agreement to respect the Moslem faith, as in the Malay States, had been entered into, for it was mainly among pagan people that these missionaries worked.

38. Thompson: *Into All Lands*. p. 655.

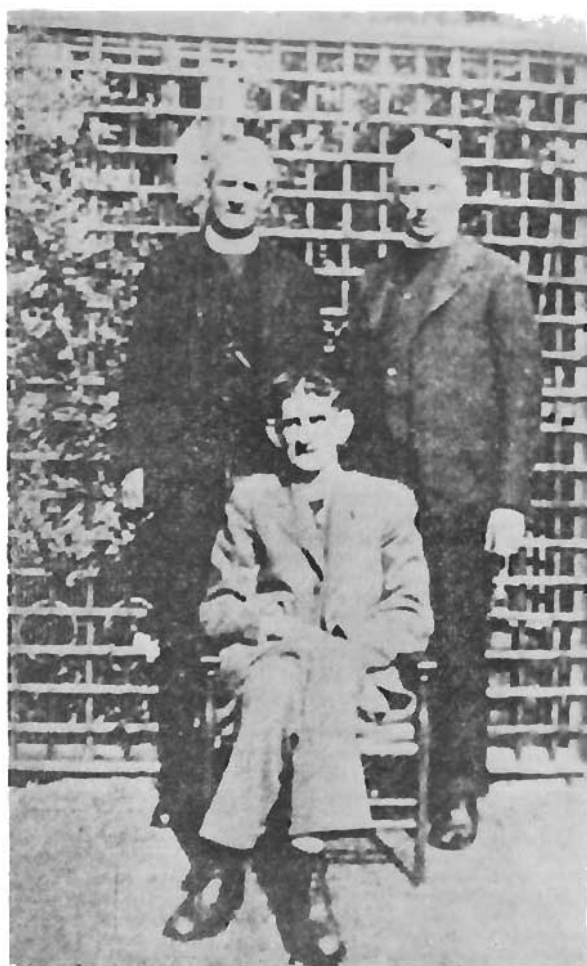
39. Certificate of Consecration. see Appendix I.



The Rev. R. Richards with priests and catechists and biblewomen of the St. Andrew's Church Mission. Rev. Richards was Superintendent 1902 to 1934.



St. Peter's Church, Stamford Road. Built 1875.
The present National Library stands on this site.



Three Archdeacons of Singapore between 1905 and 1945.

F. G. Swindell,
Colonial Chaplain,
1914 - 1929.

H. C. Izard,
Colonial Chaplain,
1905 - 1914.

Graham White,
Chaplain,
1931 - 1945.