
St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt

By ROBERT EDWARDS

*[Reprinted from Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society
South Australian Branch, Session 1954-5.]*

ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-STURT

ROBERT EDWARDS*

As the Sturt River emerges from the Mount Lofty Ranges on to the Adelaide plains, the soil along the entire length of its banks becomes exceedingly fertile due to constant flooding for untold centuries. This fact was discovered by Captain Collet Barker during his explorations early in 1831. His report eventually reached London, and the naming of "Sturt's River" was mentioned in the publications of the South Australian Association, and embodied in the maps of South Australia as early as 1834. The description of the Sturt River doubtless indicated that the land along its banks would be suitable for selection. Upon the arrival of the first settlers and their subsequent choice of country sections, from May 1838, many showed preference for this land, where they began the establishment of their farms. With this early settlement it soon became a comparatively well-populated country area and was known as the Sturt River District. The locality thus settled was one of the first in District B. It was of considerable extent, stretching from Tapley's and Shephard's Hills to Edwardstown. These pioneer settlers were responsible for the foundation of St. Mary's Anglican Church, South Road, or, as it was known to them, St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt.

A personal diary of Dr. Eldon Handasyde Duncan, which is housed among the valuable manuscripts of the South Australian Archives, provided the first intimation of church services held in the Sturt River District. Dr. Duncan, one of the first settlers, was a young, energetic pioneer and typical of the enthusiastic founders of South Australia. After completing his education at Glasgow University, where he obtained his medical degree in 1831, he commenced a distinguished career. However, the damp climate of Britain affected his health, and on 21st September 1838 he purchased an order for 80 acres of South Australian land. He temporarily abandoned his profession and sailed for South Australia on the *Katherine Stewart Forbes*, arriving at Holdfast Bay on 21st March 1839. Four days later he chose Section 115 in District B,

* Robert Edwards is a member of the Committee of the Historical Division of the Society.

situated on the corner of what are today Marion and Oaklands Roads. Here he first erected a Manning's Cottage, which he had brought out with him, and soon a wattle and daub hut was under construction. A few months after arrival his Section had been partially fenced, and farming operations commenced.

On 7th June 1839 Dr. Duncan recorded in his diary: "Mr. Fleming performed Divine Service here at 11 o'clock to all the neighbours who chose to attend." This appears to be the first of a number of services held at varying intervals. It is highly probable that the Rev. Charles Beaumont Howard, first Colonial Chaplain, officiated on some occasions. It was these services, held in a small, primitive, mud building, erected among the huge red gums of Dr. Duncan's section, that were the commencement of the movement which reached fulfilment in 1841, when the first St. Mary's was opened. Among the neighbours who took a keen interest in the church foundation were John Wickham Daw, who arrived in South Australia on the *Winchester* on 23rd September 1838, and Captain William Littlejohn O'Halloran, who came on the *Lalla Rookh* on 9th August 1840. John Wickham Daw offered a gift of one acre of his Country Section, number 41, on which to build the first church of the Sturt River District. After the initial procedure had been completed, Captain O'Halloran and Dr. Duncan carted, free of cost, all the materials needed. The building was described as both "simple and neat", composed of "stringybark", as this was one of the few materials readily available at a reasonable cost. The timber was probably local pit-sawn logs, from the Stringybark Forest, with the lower ends embedded in the earth to add strength, and the whole building roofed with shingles. This type of structure was not uncommon during the early period of South Australian history, and a few examples still remain.

It must be remembered that 1841 was perhaps the most critical year in the history of South Australia. Depression and unemployment faced all classes of colonists. Enormous losses were suffered and the future of the Province was indeed uncertain. It was in the midst of this atmosphere of personal loss and uncertainty that the pioneers of the Sturt River District turned their minds to the erection of a place of worship.

On 15th March 1841 the South Australian Church Building Society recorded: "The Committee, therefore, confidently hope that a church such as the one now in course of erection in the neighbourhood of a populous country district, will be filled by worshippers" On the 4th

July 1841 the new church was opened for public worship by the Rev. Charles Beaumont Howard, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, in honour of the 12th century church foundation of St. Mary Abbots, Church Street, Kensington, England, the Parish church formerly attended by John Wickham Daw. The Rev. Charles Howard and the Rev. James Farrell then commenced alternate Sunday services in the church and performed a number of baptisms which are entered in the Holy Trinity Baptismal Register. The regular worshippers at St. Mary's during 1842 numbered 40, and communicants 14. As a comparison, the attendance during the similar period at Port Adelaide was 60, and communicants 12. In considering these figures, allowance must be made for the fact that no confirmations were held in the Province until 1848, after South Australia had been erected into a separate Diocese.

Two Anglican churches had been opened in South Australia before St. Mary's, namely, Holy Trinity, North Terrace, Adelaide, where the first recorded service in the stone church was held on 21st July 1838, and St. Paul's Church, Port Adelaide, opened on 9th May 1841.

With the completion of St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt, those settlers who had land situated near the church were soon described as having a certain Section in District B in the Sturt River District "near St. Mary's Church". As the church became known, the address was gradually shortened to "St. Mary's", and so, at an undefined date, the District of St. Mary's emerged. The intersection of the present Daw and South Roads then became known as the "St. Mary's Crossroads". Some contemporary records intimate that not only the church was known as "St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt", but the district itself was styled the "District of St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt". The latter portion of the title denoted a general locality, rather than an exact location.

New impetus was given to the work of the Anglican Church in South Australia during 1846, firstly by the arrival of new clergymen, and secondly, by the discovery of copper and the subsequent period of prosperity. After the Rev. Charles Howard's death in 1843, the Rev. James Farrell carried the full responsibility of the church alone. On the 7th May 1846 Messrs. Woodcock and Pollitt arrived to render much needed assistance, and later in the year Messrs. Newenham and Coombs accepted the Parishes of Port Adelaide and Gawler respectively. On 23rd May 1846 the Rev. W. J. Woodcock, who had been appointed to the Incumbency of St. John's Church, Adelaide, visited St. Mary's in company with the Rev. James Farrell to ascertain the state of the church there. It is apparent from

the existing records that the pioneers of the Sturt River District had never considered their first building to be anything more than temporary. After a period of five years the stringybark timber fabric of the building was, as might be expected, showing signs of serious deterioration, brought about, no doubt, through the effects of the hot summers and wet winters. Messrs. Woodcock and Farrell found that the parishioners had already collected the sum of £70 towards rebuilding the church, and John Wickham Daw had made a gift of a further acre of land on which to erect a new permanent building. An interesting and unique feature of the gift of these two parcels of land to St. Mary's was that they were conveyed to the "Bishop of Australia and successors", who had his headquarters in Sydney. The first conveyance is dated 30th May 1842, and the second, 26th February 1847.

It is apparent that from this visitation the Rev. W. J. Woodcock had the oversight of St. Mary's, as well as his work at St. John's, and as a direct result a building committee was elected. This committee consisted of four energetic churchmen, namely: Henry Watts, Alfred Weaver, William Henry Trimmer and William Hancox.

The existing building fund was soon enlarged by grants from S.P.G., S.P.C.K., the South Australian Church Society, the Government and local subscription.

At a meeting of the Building Committee held on 13th October 1846 the plan for the Church was decided upon. This was "nothing more than a mere barn, excepting that the windows were to be of a lancet character, very small" Two weeks later, on 27th October 1846, the foundation stone was laid by Miss Conway, sister-in-law of Henry Watts, and later wife of John Warner Nicholls, first Coroner. The appropriate service of the Church of England was read to a large assembly by the Rev. James Farrell, Colonial Chaplain. If a foundation stone was carved for St. Mary's, it is now lost, but a draft of the inscription deposited beneath it is in existence.

Travelling to South Australia in the same ship as Colonel Gawler, the second Governor, were Thomas Hamilton Ayliffe and his family. The *Pestonjee Bomanjee* arrived at Glenelg on 12th October 1838, and four days later Country Sections 12 and 13 in District B were chosen as the site for "Wyndham Farm". Here the Ayliffe family settled and began the task of establishing a grazing property. A small home was soon erected of local stone quarried nearby. The soundness of this stone became known, and was used in many of the pioneer homes in the Parish. Notable among these was the two-storied dwelling of Eustace

Reveley Mitford, better known as "Pasquin". He came to the Province in the same ship as Dr. Duncan, and settled on the adjoining Section and was a founder of St. Mary's. Tradition records that the Ayliffe family offered the Building Committee the free right to quarry sufficient stone for the erection of the new church. Surviving traditions also lead us to believe that the pioneers themselves assisted in the quarrying of the stone, carted it to the site of the building by bullock-dray, and assisted in the construction of the massive stone fabric. This tradition is supported by the fact that at the time labour was expensive, and very scarce after the discovery of copper. Practical help may therefore have been imperative if the desired object was to be achieved.

Moses Garlick sailed from Gravesend on 28th June 1837 and on arrival settled in Kermode Street, North Adelaide. He was appointed Architect and superintended the construction of St. Mary's.

Captain Ray Boucaut arrived in South Australia on the 19th December 1846 in the 450-ton barque *Duke of Richmond*, commanded by Thomas Barclay. Prior to his arrival with his wife, father-in-law and eleven members of his family, he had spent many years in the service of the Honourable East India Company, commanding their ship the *Mary Ann of London*, trading mainly in the China and Indian Seas. Although Captain Boucaut did not found his "Sarnia" Estate on Section 10 and part of Sections 11 and 35 (adjoining the Ayliffe property) until the beginning of 1847, he took an immediate interest in the erection of the new Anglican church in the Sturt River District. Doubtless his contributions helped considerably towards the successful completion of the building operations. In 1848 and 1849 he was elected Church Warden, and assisted in the negotiations for the construction of the first Rectory, as well as the enlargement of the church. A small cottage was first erected on his property, and later an imposing two-storied home, built of stone from the Ayliffe quarry. Although this building was demolished some years ago, the extensive foundations can still be seen.

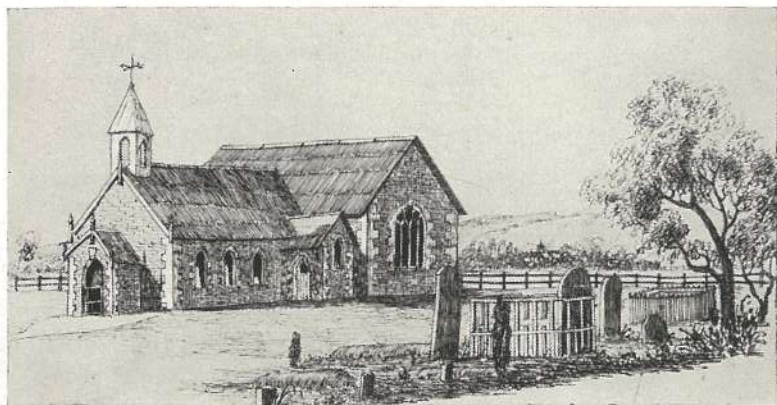
The first entry in the Parish Burial Register on 19th November 1847 records the death of James Penn at the age of 85. James Penn, father-in-law of Captain Boucaut, had been Superintendant of the Royal Victualling Department, Falmouth, Mylor. He was a descendant of William Penn, the renowned Quaker, who, on 1st September 1682, embarked in the *Welcome* for America, where he founded the Colony of Pennsylvania. Memorial Tablets in the Church perpetuate the memory of the various members of

this pioneer family who were associated with St. Mary's, and buried in the family grave in the Churchyard.

On the completion of the walls the heavy, local hardwood timbers of the roof were placed in position and held with large hand-wrought nails. The whole was then covered with stringybark shingles which were the principal form of roofing material in use. In May 1847 the new church was nearing completion. The exterior appeared much as the nave appears today, for this portion of the present church was constructed in 1846-47. The interior shows the original eight small lancet windows which provide a Gothic character to the architecture of the building. The later additions of the vestry and tower have blocked two of these windows, but the recesses still remain. The floor was most probably merely of rammed earth. There was no ceiling whatever, the underside of the rafters and shingles being plainly visible for many years. The building bore no elaborate ornamentation. It was simple, solid, strong and rugged, somewhat like the industrious pioneers who built it during such a difficult period in the history of South Australia.

Arrangements were made for a special opening service on Sunday 30th May 1847, but this had to be postponed "in consequence of the floor remaining damp longer than was expected". The opening did not take place until Sunday 12th September 1847, when "the Church was filled to over-flowing by a most respectable congregation amongst whom we noticed His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor (Major Robe) and a number of gentlemen from Adelaide and the neighbourhood". The Rev. James Farrell read the prayers, and the Rev. W. J. Woodcock preached an eloquent and impressive sermon.

There is no doubt from the many existing references that St. Mary's was certainly not considered to be complete at this stage. The South Australian Church Society, referring to churches erected in 1846-47 stated: "It is earnestly hoped that the members of the Episcopal Communion for whose benefit the above named churches (St. Mary's and St. James's, Blakiston) are intended, will exert themselves for their completion." In the preface to the publication of his opening sermon, the Rev. W. J. Woodcock records: "Another motive for the publication of this sermon is a desire to augment, in some small degree, the fund for completing the Church of St. Mary's." These, and other references, certainly lead us to believe that a plan had already been conceived for the future development of St. Mary's Church. Whether this was advanced to the stage of comprehending the complete structure,



St. Mary's Church in August 1860. From a sketch by B. H. Babbage.

By courtesy of H. D. Clare, Esq.



"St. Mary's", built by John Wickham Daw in 1842. From a sketch by B. H. Babbage.

By courtesy of H. D. Clare, Esq.

as it is known today, is not recorded. St. Mary's was not singular in being opened before its completion. It is evident that it was characteristic of the period for parishioners to commence services in their new church buildings as soon as they had advanced sufficiently for them to be able to do so. This, after all, was only natural when other suitable buildings did not exist. A striking example is the first Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide, where carpenters were still fixing the roof while the first service was being conducted.

As early as 30th October 1846, the Rev. W. J. Woodcock recorded in his Journal: "A report has reached this Province that South Australia is about to be erected into a separate Bishopric." This news was heralded with great enthusiasm, and on the arrival of the first Bishop, Augustus Short, D.D., on 28th December 1847, the old pioneer era ended and a new one commenced. The work of founding a Diocesan Organization in South Australia was a gigantic task, but Dr. Short proved to be its master, and his energetic work was soon responsible for the erection of many new churches.

Travelling to South Australia on the *Derwent* with Dr. Short was John Fulford, a layman who came to the Province with the intention of commencing agriculture. Soon after his arrival the Bishop wrote, "Yesterday, Mr. Fulford . . . professed his wish to take service in the Church. I saw enough of him on the voyage to be exceedingly pleased with him, and think he will make an excellent Clergyman. Having long been a Sunday-school teacher and ragged-school man in London, he knows something of his business. I shall appoint him catechist for Macclesfield and ordain him Deacon six months hence." The appointment as catechist and scripture reader for Macclesfield and Echunga was confirmed in a licence under date of 28th April 1848. John Fulford's work in that portion of the Diocese only lasted a short time as he was ordained deacon on 29th June 1848. This was the first ordination in South Australia and was held on the anniversary of the Consecration of Bishop Short in St. Peter's, Westminster. The Leigh Fund was made responsible for Mr. Fulford's immediate income, and in a letter dated 10th July 1848, the Bishop states: "Mr. Fulford undertakes the duty at St. Mary's about 6 miles from Adelaide, to which district will be added temporarily at least the Church nearly completed at O'Halloran Hill $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant. Together they will form one Cure, and I trust provide for their minister." Mr. Fulford's task at St. Mary's was a difficult one. Although the Rev. W. J. Woodcock had been instrumental

in encouraging the foundation and building of the new church, it was incomplete, and the provision of a Rectory had not materialized. Mr. Fulford's first consideration was the erection of a Rectory. A public meeting was held in "St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt" on Wednesday 6th September 1848 "for the purpose of adopting measures for the speedy erection of a parsonage". This meeting was held, the Lord Bishop consenting to take the chair, and negotiations for the erection of a parsonage proceeded. Bishop Short wrote on 16th September 1848: "Since I wrote last two meetings have been held in the district of St. Mary's to take measures for building a Parsonage for Mr. Fulford, £187 was subscribed, and at the same time it was unanimously agreed to increase the number of sittings in the Church and to raise the price. Under the new arrangement, if all are let, the stipend will amount to £85 exclusive of the Parsonage and 10 acres of Glebe. The value of the benefice may be stated at £120 per annum exclusive of Government Aid. This will be probably the best paid incumbency out of Adelaide."

In a letter dated 3rd October 1848 Bishop Short, as Trustee of St. Mary's Church, applied to the Colonial Secretary for a Government Grant of £150 towards the erection of the Parsonage. The Act under which Government Aid was given to churches was entitled, "An Act for Promoting the Christian Religion", and was passed by the Nominee Council on 3rd August 1847. The Act authorized Government Grants of up to £150 towards the erection of buildings for worship, with 20 acres of land for use as Glebes. Grants of up to £200 annually were also made towards the maintenance of Ministers. Under this Act St. Mary's received £50 towards the erection of the second church, £150 towards the erection of the Rectory, 20 acres of Glebe land at Darlington, and substantial grants towards the stipend fund, until aid was withdrawn in 1851.

Tenders were called at the beginning of October 1848, and building operations commenced almost immediately. The Government Grant was approved on 21st December 1848, subject to the report of the Government Architect. The building inspection was made on 7th March 1849, and showed that the building was all but complete. The following day a warrant was prepared for the payment of the Grant, and the first Rectory was completed, free of any debt, by the end of the month.

The Rectory, by modern standards, would be considered a four-roomed, unpretentious brick cottage, but in 1849 the papers were proud to call it "a large and commodious parsonage". It was constructed of solid 9-inch brickwork

and was surrounded by a low verandah. The roofing was of shingles, and the flooring all of 1-inch deal neatly finished with 9-inch x 1-inch skirtings. Rev. John Fulford took up residence in the new Parsonage during April 1849.

On arrival, one of Bishop Short's first duties was to consecrate the churches already erected by the pioneers. As early as 30th January 1848 the first church to be consecrated was opened at Woodforde (Magill). In a newspaper of 7th March 1849 the following notice appeared: "We find, by an advertisement in this day's paper, that the oldest rural Church in the Colony is to be consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Adelaide on Sunday next. This place of worship, St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt, was opened by Rev. Mr. Howard in July, 1841, and has since been re-built . . ." On the afternoon of the same day, Christ Church, O'Halloran Hill, was opened, and consecrated. The two churches have been united in the one Parish ever since.

No really acceptable evidence describes the construction of the transepts, and other additions to the fabric, of St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt. It is possible that some of the foundations, at least, may have been laid in 1846, when the nave was constructed. It has only been possible to find two records to suggest the actual additions made to the church. Firstly, during the meeting held to discuss the erection of the Rectory, a resolution was carried to "increase the number of sittings in the Church". The second reference is found in a "Tabular statement of contributions made in the several parishes during 1849". This states that, exclusive of money raised for stipend payments, general expenses and by Government Aid, the sum of £350 was contributed to St. Mary's. These short references are meagre evidence admittedly, but nevertheless they are important. Any resolution to "increase the number of sittings" in so small a building must indicate an enlargement of the fabric. Further, the expenditure of £350, after the Rectory had been completed, free of debt, can only indicate an enlargement of the church. This work probably commenced shortly after the completion of the Rectory, in April 1849. By the end of 1849, the Parochial needs of the Parish were provided. The old church, though in poor repair, was still serving as a church school. A resident incumbent occupied the new Parsonage, and the plan for the church was almost complete.

There is no reason to dispute the suggestion that the transepts, chancel, vestry and porch, as they exist today, were added to the 1846-47 aisleless nave during 1849. In the erection of the chancel and transepts, the English tra-

dition of the square-ended church persisted, and, when finished, it completed the cruciform plan consisting of an east-west nave and north and south transepts.

During the general additions, which took place in 1849, the first section of the existing tower was raised to a height of 18 feet from its foundation. With the completion of the additions, these, too, were roofed with shingles, and also provided with lath-and-plaster ceilings. It was not until the early 1870s, however, that the tower was completed to an overall height of 36 feet. The second stage is surmounted by a battlemented parapet, which adds much to the dignity of the church.

It seems that three bells have been in use since 1841. One of the first contemporary reports of the opening of the first St. Mary's intimates that: "The Church bell will ring every Sunday morning for five minutes before 9 o'clock for the Sunday School and for half an hour before 11 o'clock for Divine Service." It is quite certain that a bell of unknown size and origin existed at this early time, when bells would not have been common in South Australia. It is not known whether the bell was situated in the fabric itself, or in some form of detached belfry. The first indication of the gift of a bell is found in 1846, when Rev. Woodcock records that the Building Committee "have a bell which was presented by the late John Horrocks, Esq." This record tends to indicate that the gift had been made at some earlier period, and probably dates to 1841.

The Horrocks bell was removed from the old church, and installed in the small bellcote, situated above the western gable of the new 1846-47 nave. This provided accommodation for the bell, until about 1877, when the bellcote was removed. Even with the completion of the tower the bell was still housed in the original copper-roofed bellcote, with its weather vane, and rung by the verges from the west end. The present bell was purchased and installed in 1896.

John Wickham Daw's property, founded in 1838, had grown to over 200 acres by 1852. A large, impressive homestead, commenced in 1842, had been completed, and was named St. Mary's. A prosperous business had also been established. In 1852, this pioneer property was sold to Benjamin Herschel Babbage, who proved a most energetic colonist. There is evidence that from his arrival in the District, he greatly influenced and enhanced the progress and prosperity of St. Mary's Church. He was a Church Warden, Synodsmen and Lay Preacher for many years. It was mainly due to his enthusiasm that

the foundation stone of a new Anglican Schoolroom was laid by Bishop Short, on Saturday 21st October 1865. An Anglican School at St. Mary's provided some education for the children of the pioneers of the Sturt River District from 1841 until the early 1850s. It was about this time that the old pioneer wooden church was demolished. In 1852 a successful St. Mary's School was conducted by Rebecca Wood, in her small cottage erected on the South Road adjoining the "Church acre", on which the old building had stood, and on which the new schoolroom was built. One of the first functions held in the new St. Mary's Schoolroom took place on Monday 22nd March 1866, and from that date, the building served two most useful functions, both as a schoolhouse, and social and business meeting hall. In later years a public school under the Board of Education was conducted there.

The architecture of the schoolhouse was Gothic, in harmony with the church building itself. The fabric was of stone from Ayliffe's quarry finished to match the church. It was roofed with shingles, and measured 45 feet by 25 feet.

With the advent of public schools in the surrounding district, the day school at St. Mary's was discontinued, but the building served a useful function as a meeting hall for the district, until its demolition in 1928.

The pioneers provided for the parochial needs of the District, but subsequent generations have worked with similar determination, and so ensured the preservation of the wonderful heritage they have received. St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt has, like most of the pioneer South Australian churches, had a fluctuating history. The generous subscriptions of the first settlers and pioneer clergy in personal labour, money and land founded the Church. The grants of the great Missionary Societies in London, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, together with the provision of missionary clergy by the former, were an invaluable and irreplaceable contribution to the foundation and growth of the South Australian Anglican Church, as indeed they were in so many other British Colonies. The Government Grants of 1847-51, and subscriptions from Diocesan Funds, have also been responsible for assisting and assuring its maintenance. Speaking generally, St. Mary's maintained an enviable position among the Parishes until about 1899. In that year the Archdeacon recorded on his visitation: "Fabric and Buildings in excellent order". From that date, circumstances such as the age and the cost of maintaining buildings, death of many old pioneers,

who were generous benefactors, fluctuating population and war and its subsequent toll on the district's youth, made the task of maintaining St. Mary's increasingly difficult. Prior to the 1939-45 War, St. Mary's was essentially a country Parish Church, but since then the clawing hand of the suburbs has reached out, and the once peaceful, traditionally country Parish has been turned into a semi-industrialized suburb. This change has meant an increase in population, and St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt has begun to regain something of the importance it once enjoyed.

The buildings themselves, like all others, have been subjected to the elements. Age, wind, rain, flood, dampness, fire and earthquake have all attacked the old church building. Each generation has had to play its part in preserving the fabric against these enemies. The earthquakes of July 1883, May 1897, September 1902 and 1st March 1954, all caused damage which required repairs. A typical mid-winter report states: "On Monday night immense quantities of water came down the sides of the South Road about St. Mary's and some portions of it were very much injured by the strong current which flowed over it". Continual floodings were a major concern.

St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt, set in its typical English churchyard, still retains an air of quiet dignity, which was once shared by the surrounding district. It is to be hoped that not only the Anglicans in the community, but the public in general, will feel it a duty and a privilege to see that this historic memorial to the worthy founders of the old Sturt River District, who, in their various public offices, shared the founding of South Australia, will be suitably preserved for the generations yet to come.

