

Why was the quilt made?



During 1895, the Scots Church in Heidelberg faced a number of challenges. The Busy Bees, already associated with the Church as a fundraising group, proposed making a signature quilt so as 'to forward a Presbyterian church in the vicinity of Heidelberg'.

A church was already established at Heidelberg. The first Presbyterian church services in the district were held in 1843. Two years later the Scots Church was built in Jika Street in Heidelberg, across the street from the Police Station, close to the Vine Street corner. Fifty years on, however, the old building was dilapidated and inadequate. The Church also owned two acres of land in Burgundy Street; members agreed in June 1895 to build a new church there. Funds would be needed!

However, the church was not united in this decision. Five elders for the Scots Church were elected in May 1895 but three then declined to accept the office, and later resigned from the Board of Management. The other two did not reply to the invitation.

A month later, the Superintendent and Secretary of the Sunday School resigned. We don't know the reason, but 'in view of special circumstances' the Sunday School's afternoon sessions stopped and only morning sessions were offered. Formal meetings of the teachers ceased.

Then in July 1895, a number of Templestowe people decided to start their own Presbyterian services at their local Mechanics Institute, with ministers from the Lay Preachers Association. The creation of a separate congregation at Templestowe meant the loss of a quarter of the members of the Scots Church. This reduced its income and jeopardised the building plans.

By August 1895, when the Busy Bees proposed the quilt, the Presbyterian Church in Heidelberg was in crisis. The signature quilt may have been not only a fundraiser but also an attempt to unite the congregation and bring it closer to the wider community.

The church organist at the Scots Church was [H7] *Cr Ford*.

In 1917 Alfred Ford recalled the old Jika Street church: 'It was an oblong building with square windows on each side which had to be kept open for ventilation in the hot summer days with the disadvantage of allowing free ingress to swarms of flies. I presided at the organ for some time & a lady often wielded a fan over me to keep off the flies. The seats were old & uncomfortable.'

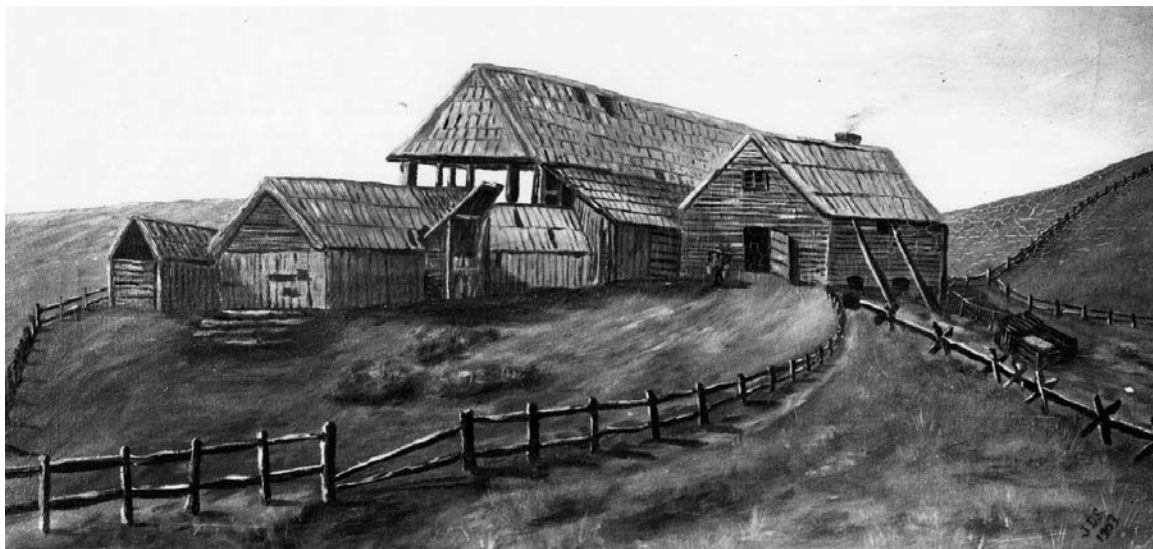
Speech by Alfred Ford celebrating the 10th anniversary of the induction of Rev. Mr Hardie for the charge of Scots Church, Heidelberg
Box 3/2 Heidelberg Scots.
Uniting Church in Australia: Victorian Archives



A little church with a big history

Heidelberg Scots Church, built in 1845, was the first Presbyterian church established in Victoria beyond the central Melbourne area. Its first minister was the Reverend Peter Gunn. He came to Melbourne in 1842, intending to provide church services in Gaelic for the large influx of Highland Scots that had migrated to the Port Phillip District. His early work was arduous. Travelling vast distances, he preached and taught school classes wherever he found Presbyterian families.

A small concentration of Highlanders had settled in Bulleen. In 1843 they 'called' Gunn to be their minister.



Alexander Duncan's barn in Bulleen.
Source: Doncaster Templestowe Historical Society

Gunn followed common practice in regions with no public buildings and conducted worship for them in Alexander Duncan's barn in Bulleen. He also conducted services for the Gaelic-speaking community at Kangaroo Ground.

In 1845 Gunn purchased land in Jika Street Heidelberg. He gifted this to his parishioners and a small brick church was constructed. It is possible that the bricks were made from clay quarried where Heidelberg Park now stands. Rendered with concrete, the church was of a simple design, as shown in the enlarged photograph hanging to the right of this section of the display.

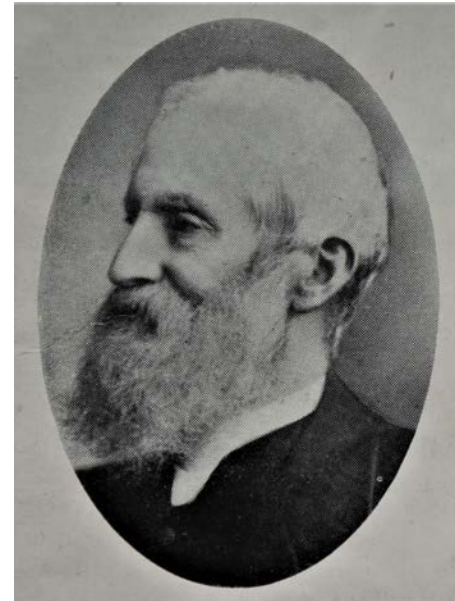
Gunn moved to the Campbellfield parish later in 1845. A decade on, he conveyed the Jika Street land to five Trustees on the condition that, if it were ever sold, the proceeds should benefit the Minister of the Church at the time of sale.

When the old church was sold after the congregation moved in 1901 to the present-day Scots Church in Burgundy Street, the land realised £200. This money was put towards purchase of the Manse in Cape Street, in accordance with Peter Gunn's instructions.



Reverend Duncan Fraser (1824-1912)

Rev Duncan Fraser has prime position in the central square of the quilt. He was the Scottish-born minister of Scots Church at the time the quilt was made.



Fraser arrived in Melbourne in 1862 with his wife and six children. His first call was to St John's, Ballarat East, where he served until 1868 when the family moved to Melbourne.

In 1869 he was inducted into the pastoral charge of Heidelberg and Janefield. Its size altered as the population and its capacity to generate a sufficient stipend ebbed and flowed. As well as the townships of Heidelberg, Preston and Northcote, his parish at various times also included North Fitzroy, Clifton Hill, Janefield (Bundoora), South Morang, Eltham, Kangaroo Ground, and Templestowe.

Fraser retired from Northcote in 1892 but refused to leave the manse attached to that church, arguing that it belonged to the Heidelberg parish.

A parting gift of £320 from the united Heidelberg and Northcote congregations enabled Fraser and his wife to take a six-month world tour while [G14] *John Caldwell* (later, minister at North Williamstown) officiated at Heidelberg.

During 1895, Fraser and his family vacated the Northcote manse and moved to Heidelberg, building *Rossarden* at 40 Banksia Street. He retired from the Scots Church in 1897.

Fraser had a long interest in scientific subjects and gave talks about the telephone, microphone and phonograph before these were in common use. His book *The Sign-Sound System of Teaching to Read* (1901) advocated a phonetic system of reading. He delivered lectures to promote its adapted alphabet.

At his funeral in 1912, Fraser was described as 'eloquent and thoughtful ... of vehement temperament, though genial and kindly bearing'. Although disputes swirled around the closing months of his tenure at both Ballarat and Northcote, as well as in Heidelberg, he was also held in great esteem by many in his community, as evidenced by his prominent place in this quilt.



The Fraser family in 1895

Reverend Duncan Fraser and his wife Anna Elizabeth (née Reay) had 12 children. Six came with them from Britain in 1862; others were born in Ballarat and Melbourne. Two boys died in infancy.

At the start of 1895, the year when the Busy Bees began work on the quilt, the younger generation comprised seven sisters and three brothers. Most still resided at home but Frances was teaching in Sydney. Anna (jnr) was married, in Fremantle.

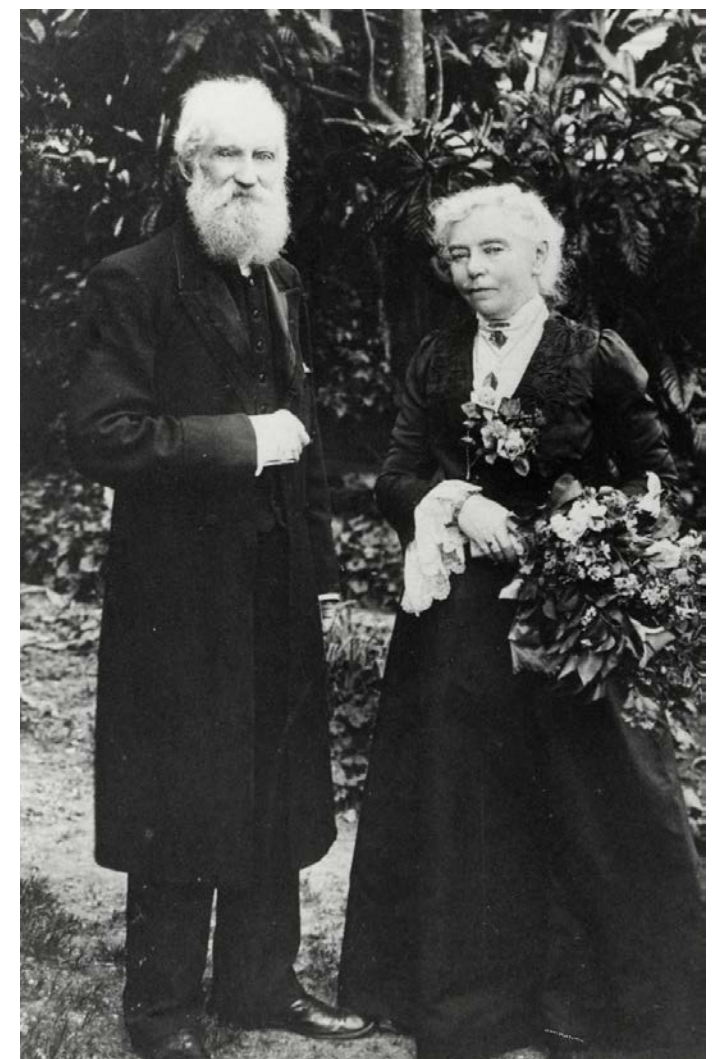
The younger sisters Charlotte and Theodora appear to have been involved with home duties and social work. Alexandra was unwell, suffering from an acute stomach infection. Elizabeth was teaching locally. Hilda was a professional actor. James, Donald and Duncan (jnr) were engineers.

The year proved to be a difficult one for the Frasers. In addition to tensions at the Scots Church, the family was bereaved when Alexandra, the second youngest daughter, died in January.

In March, Reverend Fraser decided to leave the Northcote manse where they had lived for almost

25 years. By April, the family had relocated to lodgings close to the Heidelberg railway station. Construction had started on *Rossarden*, their new home in Banksia Street. The front porch was at ground level to assist Elizabeth who walked with crutches all her life and may have suffered from polio as a child.

The house was completed by August and the Shire Council agreed to assist with making 'a formed approach' or driveway to the property.



Duncan and Anna Fraser photographed on their Golden Wedding anniversary, 12 October 1904 – perhaps in the garden at *Rossarden*.



Busy Bees and their charitable work

Around the orchards, market gardens and fields of the Heidelberg district, beekeeping was an essential activity. Bees were highly valued for their role in pollination and their production of

beeswax and honey.

The Shire's coat of arms recognised the area's agricultural and pastoral strengths: grapes (for vineyards), a cow, and a hay stook and plough. On the lower right is a beehive (the heraldic symbol for industry and



commercial activity). The skeps (basketwork) beehive is similar to the one at the quilt's centre.

Inspired by their Christian values for charitable work and the visible effects of the depression, some ladies formed a fundraising group for the Scots Church. They gave their group a name: 'Busy Bee'.

The *Evelyn Observer*, reporting this inaugural meeting, labelled the women as 'bees' and

the Busy Bee group as a 'society'. The reporter's choice of words may have been influenced by Louisa M Alcott's popular novel, *Little Women* (1868), in which four sisters spend their vacation making useful and attractive items for distribution to the needy. Their neighbour Laurie thinks 'regretfully of his own idle days' and sets about 'proving himself a fit person to belong to the Busy Bee Society'.

The Heidelberg Busy Bee society was well placed to follow the example of *Little Women*, and ready to launch new projects in support of their church, such as a fundraising quilt.



The 'Busy Bee Society' at work, as illustrated in chapter 13 of the 1896 edition of *Little Women* illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.
Source: Project Gutenberg EBook

BUSY BEE SCOTS CHURCH, HEDELBERG

The inaugural meeting of the above society took place on the 7th inst., and was well attended. Too much praise cannot be accorded to the bees which took part in this good work. The Misses Smith from Templestowe had some first-class work. Underclothing and children's dresses were well made, and sold very quickly. Misses Donaldson had charge of the refreshments assisted by Misses Smith, of Bulleen. The musical portion was very nice. Mr. Richardson opening with an organ solo, followed by Mrs. G. Smith and her daughters singing "The Holy City." Miss Kerr's song was well received. "Come unto me" by Mrs. G. and the Misses Smith was really the gem of the evening. Among those present were Councillors Bond, Davey, Holland, and Sill. It is proposed to hold Busy Bee meetings every quarter.

Evelyn Observer,
22 March 1895, p.3.



The Busy Bee quilt campaign, August 1895

An unusual event occurred at the Shire Council meeting on 14 August 1895: two ladies attended and spoke about their worthy cause. As recorded by the *Mercury and Weekly Courier*, they asked Council members to provide autographs for a fundraising quilt.

We have not yet identified Mrs McDougall, the spokeswoman. Her name does not appear on the finished quilt. The name of her companion at the Council meeting is not reported. However their advocacy clearly impressed the Council, resulting in a commitment for 15 squares on the quilt: 12 for elected Councillors, and three for senior officers (Secretary, Engineer and Treasurer).

Inspiration for the campaign probably came from signature quilts being made at the same time as fundraisers by other church groups, including by Presbyterians in East Melbourne, Fitzroy, Moreland and Northcote.

Quilt square [E15] is dated *August 1895* and may be the first one that was embroidered.

HEIDELBERGSHIRE.

COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY

Present: - Crs Peers (President)
Davey, Bond, Adams,
Holland, Ward, Mitchell,
Ryan, Lugton and Donnelly.

A DEPUTATION

Cr. Davey introduced a deputation of two ladies who desired the council's assistance in helping forward a Presbyterian church in the vicinity of Heidelberg. Mrs McDougall, who acted as spokeswoman explained that an autograph quilt was to be prepared and disposed of on the art union principle. What was asked of the council was that each member thereof would consent to take a "square " in the quilt, which would bear their autograph, and all for the modest sum of four shillings. The President (Cr. Peers) appeared to be somewhat at a loss as to how to deal with such a matter as it could hardly be called council business. However he got out of the difficulty by suggesting

that it be left to Cr. Davey to interview his brother councillors, and see if the necessary four shillings from each could be obtained. Cr. Davey was quite agreeable to this proposition, so were the ladies and they took their departure after thanking the council for the courteous reception accorded them. The matter was talked over later on with the result that the President announced that it would give him pleasure to defray the entire cost (£3) out of his allowance. The offer was received with thanks and the autograph quilt will bear the names of the fifteen Heidelberg councillors.

Mercury and Weekly Courier
Thursday 15 August 1895, p.3.