

ST PETERS CHURCH CELEBRATES 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Mining may seem a world away from the beauty and purpose of a church, but it was this that helped build St Peter's in Daylesford one hundred and fifty years ago.

The church community reflected on past stories at the anniversary celebration recently, remembering an industry that created and then damaged the church years later.

Initially the local Catholic community was served by priests from Castlemaine, Ballarat and sometimes Bacchus Marsh. Mass was said in the slab hut of John Egan – a very early local settler. Along came the gold rush, which brought a greatly increased population to the Daylesford area. Father P Slattery, remembered as a "magnificent specimen of a man and a splendid horseman" raised funds and built St. Peter's Church. The building, costing £4000, was described as Decorated Gothic sitting at 110 feet in length with a turret 76 feet high.



In 1862 two mining companies were given leases adjoining the church grounds. "The intention was that the church received 10 per cent of gold extracted," the Melbourne Advocate read. "One company drove a shaft 300 feet in length at a depth of 122 feet to a point somewhere near or under the present sanctuary of the church. This shaft was abandoned as it incessantly flooded.

"Again in 1878 it appears a shaft was also sunk on the property and gold was found 25 feet below the surface. Mining ceased and there is no evidence that the mission (parish) ever benefited financially."

The church was reopened in 1902, after suffering damage to the spire, and has been serving the town ever since. Parish Priest, Fr Gary Jones said it had always provided the region with a great sense of community. It was built on the hill so people could "look atop and fondly remember their years of learning of life and God".



It was not the first church in the region, Fr Jones said, but soon became the largest Catholic Church in the region. "We had a few hundred parishioners back then but now the whole area has changed and become more touristy and trendy - this changes the face of the church," he said.



"People are still coming here for weddings and baptisms and we get a lot of people from the smaller towns around here too." He said there are about 90 to 100 current parishioners, with a recent redevelopment adding to the excitement of the 150th anniversary.

Mass was celebrated to observe the milestone on June 14, led by Bishop of Ballarat Paul Bird, followed by a light lunch at St Michael's School. Also after Mass the Bishop blessed a cross from the former Presentation Convent in Daylesford that had been restored and erected in the church grounds to make the celebrations.