

1.4 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE

The Diocese of Newcastle was founded by Royal Letters Patent in 1847. The boundaries of the new See were thus defined: From the Hawkesbury River in the South, to the 21st Parallel of Latitude on the North, and from the Pacific on the East, to the boundary of South Australia - the 141st degree of Longitude - on the West.

On the 29th June, St Peter's Day, of that year, the Reverend William Tyrrell was consecrated in Westminster Abbey as the first Bishop and on the 30th January of the following year (Dr Tyrrell's forty first birthday) he was installed in the Cathedral at Newcastle.

There were then 14 Clergy in the Diocese including two whom the Bishop had brought with him.

In 1859 the area of the Diocese was reduced by the formation of the new Bishopric of Brisbane, all of the parent Diocese of Newcastle lying north of the Queensland border was embraced in the new See.

Eight years later the creation of the Diocese of Grafton and Armidale wholly out of the parent Diocese fixed the Northern boundary. A further curtailment was effected when the Diocese of Bathurst was formed.

In 1940 by arrangement with the Diocese of Grafton, the Newcastle Diocesan Boundary was slightly extended on the North so as to embrace the district of Heron's Creek, which previously was within the Diocese of Grafton but had always been worked from Newcastle.

The boundaries of the Diocese as now existing are thus described:

Commencing at a point on the coast where Cathie Lake empties into the ocean; thence by Cathie and Ten Mile Creeks to the top of Broken Bago Range; hence by that range to Mount Comboyne; thence by an imaginary line running westward to the intersection of the counties of Parry and Vernon; thence in a South Westerly direction, following the Liverpool Range to the Goulburn River; thence by the river to a point above the village of Bylong; thence by the mountain range in a Southerly direction to the Colo River at its junction with Putty Creek; thence by the Colo and Hawkesbury Rivers to the coast; thence in a Northerly direction to the point of commencement.

Dr Tyrrell's Episcopate ended with his death in 1879. The 14 Clergy of 1847 had grown to 28.

Dr Josiah Brown Pearson was the next occupant of the See. He resigned in June, 1889, after 9 year's labour, leaving a clergy roll of 44.

In November 1890, The Right Reverend George Henry Stanton, DD., was transferred from North Queensland to the vacant See. He died 15 years later, on 4th December, 1905.

John Francis Stretch, DD. some time Coadjutor-Bishop of Brisbane, and afterwards Dean of Newcastle, was elected as Dr Stanton's successor, at a special session of Synod, held in February, 1906. He occupied the See for 13 years, when failing health led him to resign as from June 30, 1919. To the very great regret, however, of all who knew him, he did not live to enjoy his retirement. His death occurred on 9th April, 1919. During his episcopate the clergy roll increased from 45 to 70.

As successor to Dr Stretch, the Right Reverend Reginald Stephen, DD., at that time Bishop of Tasmania, was elected on the 8th April, 1919. He resigned the See as from 1st March, 1928. During his episcopate a great advance was made in Diocesan institutions. St Alban's Home for Boys, St Elizabeth's Home for Girls, St George's Training Farm, St Hilda's Hostel for Girls, St Stephen's House for the early training of candidates for the ministry, and the Broughton School for Boys being established; and the Provincial College of St John was removed from Armidale to Morpeth.

The number of licensed clergymen in the Diocese had reached 95.

The Right Reverend George Merrick Long, CBE., LL.D., DD., then Bishop of Bathurst, was elected to the See at a special session of Synod on the 6th December, 1927, and was enthroned in Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle on the 1st May, 1928. Death claimed him with tragic suddenness whilst attending the Lambeth Conference in 1930. By reason of his death the Church lost one of its most prominent ecclesiastics, whose wisdom and statesmanship in the great problems of Australia left an indelible record of unselfishness, character and efficiency both within and without the Church. Following on his demise, a Special Session of Synod for the election of a Bishop was summoned by the Administrator of the Diocese, the Venerable H.A. Woodd, BA., Archdeacon of Newcastle, which met on the 9th September, 1930: but as the Synod failed to elect a Bishop, the responsibility in accordance with the terms of the relative Ordinance, devolved upon the Bishop Election Board, which on the 14th November, 1930, elected unanimously to the vacant See the Right Reverend Francis de Witt Batty, MA., ThSoc., who accepted the position and was duly enthroned in Christ Church Cathedral on the 3rd day of March, 1931.

Bishop Batty resigned the See as from 30th September, 1958. During his long Episcopate of twenty-eight years, he made a marked contribution to the life of the Diocese and to the Church and community in general.

The two outstanding projects were the establishments of the C.A. Brown Homes for the Aged, and the buying and re-establishing of St. John's Theological College, Morpeth. His contribution to the wider Church was well recognised, in particular his long leadership of the Constitutional movement, culminating in the acceptance of a Constitution by General Synod in 1955.

The Election Synod met in April, 1958 and elected the Right Reverend James Alan George Housden, BA., Th.D., Bishop of Rockhampton, who was translated and enthroned on the 21st November, 1958. He held office for fourteen years when declining health led to his resignation as from 31 December, 1972. His occupancy of the See was marked by a deep pastoral concern for clergy and people alike to the great gain of the whole diocese in union and concord.

The Election Synod met on 16th October, 25th November and 28th November, 1972 but failed to elect a Bishop. Under the provisions of the election ordinance the election of the Bishop was delegated to Diocesan Council, which on 7th December, 1972 elected The Right Reverend Ian Wotton Allnutt Shevill, MA., ThD., General Secretary of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and formerly Bishop of North Queensland. Bishop Shevill was enthroned on the 6th August, 1973.

His episcopate was marked by a reconstitution of the administration under six Portfolios, the strengthening of the finances of the diocese, the enlargement of bonds with the community, the beginning of plans to extend the C.A. Brown Anglican Village and to complete Christ Church Cathedral.

Ill health caused him to resign the See on 30th September, 1977. The Election Synod met on 12th November and elected the Right Reverend Alfred Charles Holland, then Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Perth. He was enthroned on 24th February, 1978 in Christ Church Cathedral.

Bishop Holland resigned the See on 6 August, 1992, the twenty second anniversary of his consecration as a bishop. During his episcopate there was the construction of Bishop Tyrrell Lodge at the Morpeth Conference Centre, the creation of new parishes, the development of The Samaritans Foundation and specialist chaplaincies. He was a strong advocate of the ordination of women.

The Election Synod was summoned by the Administrator of the Diocese, The Very Reverend Graeme Russell Lawrence, ThL., and met on 1-3 October, 1992. The Synod failed to elect a Bishop. A further Synod met on 11-12 December, 1992 and elected The Right Reverend Roger Adrian Herft, BD., BTh., then Bishop of Waikato, New Zealand. He was enthroned on 6th May, 1993 in Christ Church Cathedral.

Bishop Herft was elected Archbishop of Perth and resigned the See on 15 April 2005. During his episcopate church schools were established, chaplaincy ministry expanded and the establishment of the Two Bishops Trust occurred. A very good working relationship with the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Diocese developed as did a good rapport with the community.

The Election Synod was summoned by the Administrator, The Right Reverend Graeme Stanley Rutherford, BA., MA.,ThL.,ThSchol.,DipRE and met on 10-12 March 2005. The Synod elected The Right Reverend Dr Brian George Farran, BA., BLitt.,ThL., DMinStuds then Bishop of the Northern Region in the Diocese of Perth. Bishop Farran was enthroned on 24 June 2005 in Christ Church Cathedral.

During Bishop Farran's episcopate the Diocese has embarked on a journey in becoming a missional church. The focus on mission has enabled the establishment of a majority of the parishes of the Diocese as Ministering Communities in Mission, together with the establishment of Ministry teams of both local ordained Priests and Deacons and authorised lay people working together with stipendiary clergy to further the witness, work and mission of the church across the Diocese. This time has seen the establishment of the Degree course in Theology at the University of Newcastle following the closure of St John's College at Morpeth, and also the establishment of the Newcastle School for Theology and Ministry. New appointments of resourcing clergy have included the appointment of Ministry Development Officers and an Emerging Church networker. This time has also seen the further development of the working relationship with the Catholic Diocese of Maitland and Broken Bay through the establishment of the Tri Diocesan Covenant in 2008. Bishop Farran retired in December 2012.

The Diocese continued under a period of administration during 2013, the Rt Reverend Peter Stuart, Assistant Bishop of the Diocese acting as Administrator. The Election Synod was summoned by the Administrator, and met on 12-13 April 2013. The Synod failed to elect a Bishop. A further Synod met on 13-14 September 2013 and elected The Right Reverend Gregory Edwin Thompson CSJ, MAICD ThL, BTh(2A Hons)., then Bishop of the Northern Territory, to be the 13th Bishop of Newcastle. Bishop Thompson was Commissioned and Installed on 2nd February 2014 in Christ Church Cathedral.

The area of the Diocese is given at 41437 square kms, with a population of approximately 934,000 of whom it is estimated some 279,000 are Anglicans.

BISHOPS OF NEWCASTLE

William Tyrrell, DD., 1847-1879

Josiah Brown Pearson, LLD., DD., 1880-1889

George Henry Stanton, DD., 1890-1905

John Francis Stretch, DD., 1906-1919

Reginald Stephen, DD., 1919-1928

George Merrick Long, CBE., DD.,LLD.,VD., 1928-1930

Francis de Witt Batty, MA., ThSoc., 1931-1958

James Alan George Housden, BA., ThD., 1958-1972

Ian Wotton Allnutt Shevill, AO., MA.,ThD., 1973-1977

Alfred Charles Holland, BA., DipTh., 1978-1992

Roger Adrian Herft, BD., BTh. 1993-2005

Brian George Farran, BA. BLitt. ThL. DMinStuds. 2005- 2012

Gregory Edwin Thompson CSJ, MAICD, ThL, BTh(2A Hons). 2014 -

Assistant Bishops of Newcastle

Robert Edward Davies, 1964

Leslie Stibbard, 1964-1976

Geoffrey Frank Parker, 1974-1982

Richard Franklin Appleby, 1983-1992

Graeme Stanley Rutherford, 2000-2008

Peter Derrick James Stuart, 2009-