THE PARISH OF NARELLAN.

In The Beginning.

On the fly-leaf of the first church register of the Parish of Narellan the Reverend Thomas Hassall wrote what must certainly be regarded as the first piece of historical documentation of the Church of England in Australia outside the colony of Sydney. In whispy handwriting and on a now fading brown page, Hassall inscribed the following:-

"Mem- Heber Chapel was opened by the Rev S Marsden on the 30 Nov 1833- 1828.

The Rev T Hassall took Charge of the Districts of Cook, Mulgoa, South Creek, Cabramatta, Camden, Goulburn Plains, Bong Bong & Inverary - 1 April 1827 -

All Saints Chapel Sutton Forest was opened by the Venerable Archdeacon Broughton 10 Jan 1830 -

School House at Camden opened by Rev T Hassall 26 Augu 1838

Mulgoa Church Consecrated Penrith Do ---- Do 16 July 1839

By the Right Rev Bishop Broughton

St Peters Do New Farm 20 Nov 1839 --

Do --- Do ---"

St. Thomas's, Mulgoa, mentioned in the quotation, was consecrated by Bishop Broughton on 13th September, 1838.

Hassall's parish was described by someone else at the time as "all of Australia beyond Liverpool", the only other churches in the south-western part of the colony being St. Luke's Liverpool, and St. Peter's Campbelltown.
THE FIRST RECTOR:

The Hassall family came to Sydney in 1798, having first attempted to do missionary work in Otaheiti. The family was well received by the Governor and its members found employment under the first two Chaplains to the colony, the Reverends Richard Johnson and Samuel Marsden as teachers and readers. One of the family was Rowland Hassall, who, with his wife and family, went to live in Parramatta. The Rowland Hassall's eldest child, a boy named Thomas, after being educated under the eye of Samuel Marsden, was sent to England in 1817, and studied for the ministry at Lampeter College in Wales, and being ordained deacon and priest, after taking the degree of Master of Arts, was appointed by King George IV as a Chaplain in New South Wales in 1821. On his return to the colony in the same year, Hassall was appointed to be assistant to the Reverend Samuel Marsden at Parramatta. He accomplished a number of important things whilst at Parramatta. He founded the first Sunday School in Australia there. He met Anne Marsden, Samuel's eldest daughter, and they were married in 1822. They worked on together with Marsden for several more years until they were transferred to the penal settlement of Port Macquarie in 1824, and, from there, to O'Connell Plains, near Bathurst, in 1826. Only a year was spent at O'Connell Plains and on 1st April, 1827, Hassall was appointed to what was then known as the Cowpasture District.

THE FIRST COMMUNITY:

It is impossible here to even outline the development of the community which later was to be become the towns of Camden and Narellan and the village of Cobbitty. One or two snippets will have to suffice.

The earliest grants in what is now the Parish of Camden were issued to John Macarthur in 1805, totalling five thousand acres and named "Camden Park" and "Upper Camden", and a grant of two thousand acres to Walter Davidson named "Belmont". No further grants were made until 1822 when 1150 acres each were allotted to James and William Macarthur and one or two other small grants were made.
By 1825 the whole of the remaining land in the Parish had been acquired by grant or purchase by John Macarthur and it included land which had been reserved in 1822 for the establishment of a church, school, public buildings and a township near the present town of Camden. The first proposal for the establishment of a town was made in 1820 by the Reverend Robert Cartwright but twenty years elapsed before a town was created.

A site for a village named Narellan was surveyed by Robert Hoddle in 1827 but was regarded as unsuitable because of the absence of water. In 1830 some prominent citizens addressed a memorial to the Governor, pointing out an eligible site for the erection of a church, school, gaol, etc., and this report was transmitted to the Surveyor-General, Major Mitchell, for consideration. He replied that the western bank of the Nepean was the most suitable site, being elevated above floods and with adequate water resources. It was suggested that Macarthur might give up enough land for a small township thereby increasing the value of his property.

Macarthur was communicated with in connection with the matter and he replied on 3rd June, 1831, in the following terms:

"I do myself the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 30th ult., and beg to acquaint you for the information of His Excellency the Governor that I should be most happy to meet his wishes, were I not apprehensive that the formation of a town on my property at Camden would in the present state of this colony, greatly endanger the security of the whole establishment on that Estate."

Nothing further was done to establish a town during Macarthur's lifetime. After his death a village was surveyed in 1836 and the land offered for sale in 1840. In that year the "Sydney Herald" reported favourably on the subdivision and design of the proposed village of Camden.

John Oxley, born in England in 1783, applied for and was appointed to the position of Surveyor-General of Lands in New South Wales in 1812. Oxley made explorations during his term of office. In 1816 Governor Macquarie granted him a thousand acres in the Cowpastures area to which Oxley gave the name of "Kirkham". Here he built a large house and began farming — wheat growing and sheep breeding being his choice. His house has long been demolished to make room for the present building known as "Camelot", but the building he erected as a barn, coach-house, and men's quarters, still stands, with the date 1816 decipherable on its walls. Here, in the loft, Marsden was in the custom occasionally of holding Divine Service until a more suitable place could be built.
In 1812 six hundred acres were granted to the Reverend William Cowper, who named the property “Macquarie’s Gift”. His son, Charles, who inherited the property and who married Eliza Sutton of Wivenhoe in Essex, changed the name to “Wivenhoe”. The house was built in 1837 and includes a number of features which suggest that the design was John Verge’s and if not actually his, it is thought that the builders concerned might also have built Camden Park. The recessed windows are identical with those at the Macarthur home. Changes have been made by subsequent owners, but the large reception rooms and the hall remain unaltered.

Both Oxley and Charles Cowper were very active in the affairs of the Parish during the formative years of its history.

Space prevents mention being made in this slender work of occupants of such historical places as “Brownlow Hill”, “Maryland”, and “Gledswood”.

THE FIRST RECTORY:

The Hassall family had secured land around Cobbitty and Narellan and Thomas and his family went to live with a brother at Macquarie Grove. It was Hassall’s intention to build a residence at The Oaks and he actually had material in hand to do this when “Denbigh”, the home of Charles Hook, became available and he bought it. Hassall managed his estate and ministered within his parish from “Denbigh” for forty-one years until his death in 1868.

The present Rectory, opposite St. Paul’s Church, was begun to be built in late 1869 and was completed and occupied by mid-1871 by the second Rector, A. W. Pain, who later became Bishop of Gippsland.

THE FIRST PLACE OF WORSHIP:

From the material Hassall had acquired to build the residence at The Oaks he built the Heber Chapel, so named after Reginald Heber of the Diocese of Calcutta, in which Diocese the whole of Australia was during these early years. The Heber Chapel was dedicated by Samuel Marsden on 30th November, 1828, and served the Parish as its place of worship until 1842. The Heber Chapel is still in constant use.
THE FIRST CHURCH:

In 1837 the suggestion was made that the Heber Chapel be enlarged to meet the growing needs of the Parish but immediate action was not taken. In 1840 it was agreed that a new church would be a wiser proposition and no time was lost in getting the project begun. The architects were Messrs. John Verge and Bibb and the total cost of the building was £2522/7/6. The Parish Minutes, List of Subscribers, and the account of expenditure relating to the building of the church is still retained by the Rector.

The church was consecrated by the then Bishop of Australia, the Right Reverend William Grant Broughton, on 5th April, 1842, and a letter from the Bishop through his secretary dated 2nd March, 1842, appointing the day of consecration has survived to the present day.

The pipe organ in St. Paul’s was installed by William Davidson late in 1875 and early in 1876 at a cost of £190/-/- and was restored by Arthur Jones in 1969 at a cost of almost $3000.00.

Thomas Hassall died on 26th March, 1868, and his grave lies midway between the first place of worship (Heber Chapel) and the first church (St. Paul’s) in the Parish of Narellan. In later years St. Thomas’s, Narellan (1884), and St. Mark’s, Elderslie (1902), become the second and third churches of the Parish.