

First Church opened 221 years ago on 25 August 1793, used as a school.

By Dr Graham McLennan www.chr.org.au www.nchs.net.au

The Rev Richard Johnson as Australia's first Chaplain spent 12 years in Australia from 1788 to 1800, building the first Church which was also used as one of the Colony's first schools. The celebration of the bicentenary took place in 1993. Though two independent small schools had been established by some women, Johnson was employed by the Crown reporting to the Governor who made provision for school funds as early as 1789.

Writing to his friends in England in a letter about educating the children, Johnson wrote:

"It is from a long and ardent wish that the minds of the rising generation of this Colony may be duly thus impressed with such moral and religious sentiment, that the following Plan has been adopted, & Rules & regulations have been made, which I hope every Parent as well as others concerned in bringing up children will see it to be their duty & interest to promote.

Within ten years in 1798, 150 children (before the fire) were enrolled at Sydney, 171 at Parramatta with another 137 at Hawkesbury.

Amongst the 18 Rules for the first school in Australia in 1798 were these three:

That this School is to be considered for the Benefit of Children of all Descriptions of Persons, whether Soldiers, Settlers or Convicts, provided they comply with the Rules here laid down.

The children to be catechized, & to sing one of Dr Watt's Hymns for Children every Sunday forenoon, & to be catechized at Church at such times as Mr Johnson or the clergyman officiating may find convenient. Such parents as neglect or refuse to send their children to be thus instructed, to be deprived of the Privilege of the School.

A Form of Prayer to be read by one of the School Masters, & one of Dr. Watt's Hymns to be sung morning & evening. And it is strongly recommended that Parents will send their Children early to School to pray, as they are able, for a Blessing to attend the Instruction given them.

So a new generation developed known as the Currency Lads & Lasses, certainly different from their parents as expressed in the quote by Peter Cunningham, Senior Naval Surgeon who wrote in 1820 of the colony's native born ".....they are little tainted with the vices so prominent among their parents. Drunkenness is almost unknown with them and honesty proverbial; the few of them that have been convicted having acted under the bad auspices of their parents and relatives....."

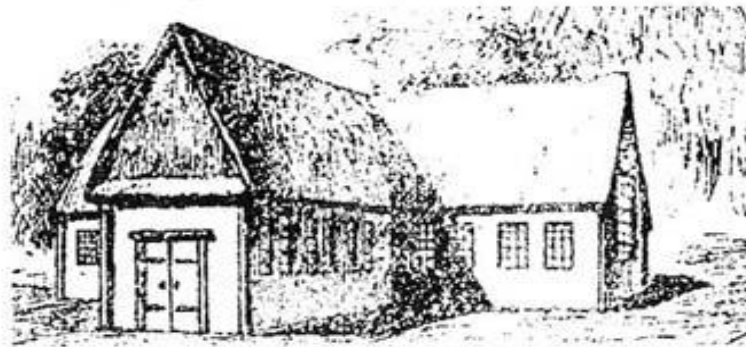
Sir William Burton Supreme Court Judge in Sydney reported in 1833 how he was impressed with the law-abiding nature of the native born. He wrote "There was not one of them ever tried before the writer for any of those atrocious crimes which are attributed to their country, but belong only to the convict class; nor did he know of any

person born in the colony, being tried or even charged with, either the offence of rape or any other licentious crime; nor has he ever found any offence committed by any of them, such as to call upon him to pronounce sentence of death; and no such sentence has ever been passed with his knowledge, or any crime committed with such a degree of violence to justify it”.

It is interesting how this education brought renewal. It demonstrates how a godly education system can bring a righteous destiny to a nation!

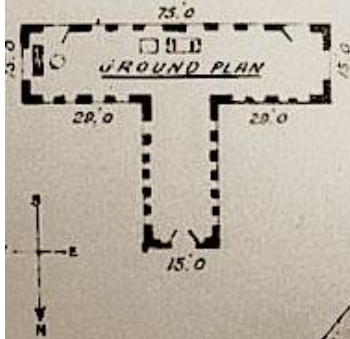
Johnson also helped initiate the first orphan school in the Colony under Governor King raising money for the Female Orphan School at Parramatta before and after his departure from the colony.

Last year in 2013 bicentenary celebrations took place for the laying of the Orphan School’s foundation stone by Governor Macquarie. This year, 200 years ago in 1814, 70 of the first female orphans entered the Institution where they were educated and given a Bible on their departure.



The First Church built in Australia and used as a School 25 August 1793 built by the Reverend Richard Johnson

*The first Church in Australia.
Opened Aug. 25th 1795. Burnt Oct. 1st 1798.*



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