

All Hallows Parish, Balwyn Parish

History

All Hallows was originally part of Our Holy Redeemer Parish, Surrey Hills. To serve the needs of the Balwyn section of his parish, Fr David Gleeson, Parish Priest of Surrey Hills (1922–33), negotiated the purchase of land in Brenbeal Street and the construction of a church-school. The Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix, opened and blessed the church-school in January 1930. In its early years, it was used as a church only.

In 1933, Rev. Dr Collins succeeded Fr Gleeson as Parish Priest of Surrey Hills and, under his guidance, the Balwyn section of the parish grew slowly in numbers and strength. Fr Timothy Fitzpatrick replaced Dr Collins in 1941 and was convinced that Balwyn would ultimately become a parish in its own right. His first move was to secure the services of the Sisters of St Joseph, and, in 1942, All Hallows School opened its doors. The sisters gave devoted service to the parish for the next 20 years and were followed by the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In 1948, Fr Fitzpatrick's second initiative was to purchase the block of land at the corner of Jurang and Brenbeal Streets as a site for a new All Hallows Church, and in 1956 an additional property was purchased as a future presbytery. The following few years saw a great quickening of interest and enthusiasm as the people of Balwyn applied themselves to the task of fundraising and campaigning for All Hallows to become a parish in its own right. This occurred in January 1959, when parish boundaries were re-drawn and Fr J P Shorten, formerly of Kew, was appointed Parish Priest of All Hallows Parish, Balwyn. Initially, for two years only, All Hallows Parish incorporated the new church-school of St Bridget's Greythorn, which became a parish in its own right early in 1961.

All Hallows church-school became a parish in its own right in January 1959, with the appointment of Fr Jim Shorten as the first Parish Priest. Between 1950 and 1960, there were significant population increases across Melbourne due to Australia's post-war immigration program. This necessitated the establishment of new parishes in the Archdiocese.

Prior to this, the Catholic community of Balwyn was one of a dozen communities under the jurisdiction of Our Holy Redeemer Parish, Surrey Hills (later referred to affectionately as the 'the grandparent' parish). The boundaries of the Surrey Hills Parish, established in 1911, were eventually re-drawn and broken up into twelve parish units. The following list shows when boundaries of the Surrey Hills Parish, established in 1911, were re-drawn and broken up into twelve parish units.

Parishes

1911	Our Holy Redeemer Surrey Hills
1927	St Francis Xavier Box Hill
1952	St John the Evangelist Mitcham
1952	St Benedict's Burwood
1954	St Thomas the Apostle Blackburn

1955	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Wattle Park
1959	All Hallows Balwyn
1961	St Bridget's Greythorn
1962	St Luke's Blackburn South
1962	St Clare's Box Hill North
1962	St Scholastica's Bennetswood
1966	St Philip's Blackburn North
1967	St Gregory the Great Doncaster

Within a year of All Hallows separating from Surrey Hills and becoming a parish, Fr Shorten organised for the Brenbeal Street land (purchased by the Surrey Hills Parish in 1948) to be cleared in preparation for the construction of a new church.

On 26 November 1961, Bishop Fox officiated at the laying of the foundation stone for the church. Less than a year later (the year of the opening of the Second Vatican Council), on 29 July 1962, All Hallows Church was blessed and opened by Bishop John Jobst, of Broome. The untiring efforts of Fr Shorten and the zealous cooperation of the parishioners were widely acknowledged. To the credit of parishioners and Fr Shorten, the debt on the church was fully paid off by 1972.

A booklet prepared for attendees of the Blessing and Official Opening All Hallows Church (29 July 1962) emphasised the resolve of the Balwyn parishioners that the church be seen and honoured as a war memorial:

In the midst of our rejoicing, we should not lightly forget that the new building is a memorial to the fallen of two world wars and that our very presence is due largely to the devotion of those who gave their lives in the service of their country. Let us remember them constantly in our prayers and ask Almighty God that their sacrifice be not in vain.

The booklet included some of the following descriptions (extracts only) of the church:

The new church, located on an elevated site at the corner of Brenbeal and Jurang Streets, and within a short distance of Whitehorse Road, harmonises with the built-up residential locality and surrounding area. It is restrained in character, with a traditional feeling.

The church provides accommodation for 500 people in spaciouly proportioned seating of French polished Mountain Ash. The dominating feature is the High Altar, which is of white marble with a pink marble surround. It was made in Italy and was specially designed for the Church.

The church ceiling is of acoustic tile in pale lemon colour, and the walls are of pastel salmon tint. Wood fittings are in polished Queensland Maple. The walls are highlighted by brilliant antique glass windows, having a gradation of colour, blue predominating. All blend together to make one harmonious whole. Each of the windows contains an emblem of a Saint suitably inscribed.

The main access to the church is through a well-proportioned Narthex at the eastern end, which as well provides ample area for distribution of parish magazines and literature. The building can be conveniently entered from three sides and includes an easy-going ramp for the less able. Advantage has been taken of the rather steeply falling ground to incorporate meeting rooms accommodation beneath the building and entered from ground level. There is ample area left within the grounds to allow for waiting vehicles at weddings or other ceremonies to come direct to the main entry Narthex.

Externally, the church is of cream brick walls with dark brick base and roofed with terra cotta tiles. Architectural features are trimmed with white cement finish. Rising above the whole church from a slender brick shaft at the eastern end is a bronze Cross. The base of this shaft is surmounted on the Foundation Stone.

Parish School

The next major project for the parish was the construction of a new school. Additional classrooms were needed to replace the cramped school-church building constructed in 1930. Two houses in Brenbeal Street (Nos 9 and 11) were purchased consecutively by Fr Shorten (1970) and Fr Skehill (1972) to allow for the proposed new building. Fr Tom McCarthy assumed responsibility for the final plans and construction. The school was blessed by Bishop Perkins and opened by the Honourable Andrew Peacock MP on 28 November 1976.

For 20 years, the Sisters of St Joseph had administered the original school, which opened in 1942. The Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus succeeded them and played a major role in the successful establishment and administration of the new school.

In 2012, when the parishes of Deepdene and Balwyn amalgamated, All Hallows Primary School was closed. The school site was subsequently leased by Genazzano FCJ College Kew as a separate campus for its Year 9 program. Later, in 2018, Villa Maria Catholic Homes signed a long-term lease on the site. It is now home for St Paul's School, a Catholic specialist school for children with a wide range of intellectual and physical disabilities.

Church Name

The name derives from the Old English term of 'hallowed', meaning holy or sanctified. All Hallows Day, or All Saints Day, is a Christian celebration in honour of all the saints from Christian history. It was in the eighth century that the Church appointed a special date for the Feast of All Saints, which in Western Christianity is observed on 1 November each year. The Eastern Orthodox Church and associated Eastern Catholic churches observe All Saints Day on the first Sunday following Pentecost.

As noted earlier, All Hallows Church Balwyn was originally annexed to Our Holy Redeemer Parish, Surrey Hills. Fr David Gleeson, parish priest of Surrey Hills (1922–33), negotiated the purchase of land in Brenbeal Street and the construction of a church-school to serve the needs of the Balwyn section of his parish. It is generally

thought that Fr Gleeson chose the name of All Hallows in honour of his Alma Mater in Ireland, All Hallows College, where he had undertaken his priestly studies.