

# *How did it all start?*

Don MacRobert

*Well, one may dig deep into a bit of history ...*

Many years ago, Bishop Furse, the Bishop of Pretoria, lost his daughter, Jane, and he decided to establish a mission out at what is now known as Jane Furse in memory of her. He started by having a hospital built, and then a primary school, plus a vicarage.

Later, the Community of the Resurrection (CR) Fathers came and established a mission and training institution. It was they who built the old stone buildings which now form part of the headmasters/administrative block and the old chapel at what is now St Mark's College.

With the advent of Dr Verwoerd and the tough apartheid laws, religious institutions were put under considerable pressure. This led to the CR Fathers ultimately leaving their Jane Furse institution and the hospital being handed over to the government, which also took over the primary school, now Kalafong Primary School.

This meant that the buildings erected by the CR Brothers stood deserted for many years.

However, the farm on the mission property fell under the Synod, and continued to operate. The vicarage was occupied by the parish priest. The parish fell under the Greater Pretoria Diocese.

At the meeting of the synod of Pretoria in the

early 1980s, the resident vicar, Father Johannes Manaswe, called on the synod to resuscitate the Jane Furse Centre, which at that stage consisted of these deserted stone buildings.

Synod accepted the challenge and appointed Bishop Kraft, who was then Bishop of Pretoria and myself, to start establishing a school. Our committee consisted of a number of priests including Father David Swanepoel, Father Fred Pitout, Hugh Brown (then the head of St Mary's DSG) and Father Robert Clucas.

Others joined the committee and the first initiative was to start restoring the broken windows and roofs of the old stone buildings.





Our first approach was to the Anglican Student Associations of universities, who came and worked in their holidays. They were given building materials and they set about repairing the less major breakages. They slept in the old stone buildings.

We then established a committee to raise funds for the substantial buildings which would be required and to carry out the major repairs needed to the deserted stone buildings. Members of the fundraising committee (including Percy Levick, Sue Leuner, Liz Faber, Jenny Gauche) used to meet regularly with the headmaster, Peter Anderson, once he had been appointed. We met at the home of Sue Leuner in Johannesburg. But more about fundraising later.

We decided to open the doors in 1985, but there was a major panic before we could do so, as the buildings were not complete, and there were certainly not enough dormitories for the soon-to-be-arriving school children. So there was a massive flurry to get the water supply and drains working in the old stone buildings. We finished the night before the first children arrived.

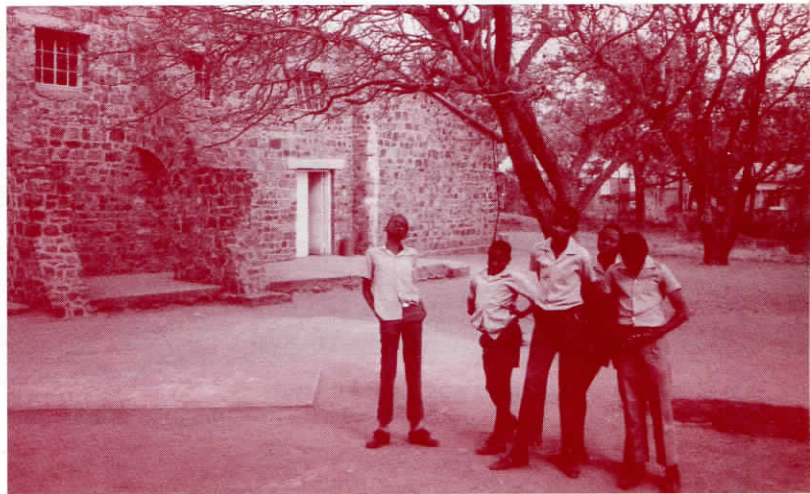
*We finished the night before the first children arrived.*



And then we suddenly had to start building a new dormitory. To make it easier for the builder, we simply sketched the plans in the sand by dragging our feet on the ground to complete a rectangle. The builder did a super job – although he complained that the roof structure was a bit wobbly!

This meant that the first pupils had to start off life at the school in a dormitory up in the chapel.

The selection of the headmaster and his wife was an interesting process. Applications were called for. A first round of interviews was held in the offices of Hugh Brown, of St Mary's DSG in Pretoria.



But we insisted on taking the candidates one by one out to Jane Furse, to show them where they were actually heading. It was so interesting to see that many of these candidates arrived in suits and smart shoes – one wife even came in high heels.

Far and away the best prepared were Peter and Elisabeth Anderson, who arrived in comfortable veldskoek and khakis; and, of course, they proved to be an excellent choice.

Professor Maimela at Unisa was very helpful indeed. He prepared a small entrance test for the applicants – this was in English and Sepedi.

But we realized that we could not go it alone for the

school. We needed to have the full support of the community. Some meetings were held with the people of Jane Furse, and they fully endorsed the creation and establishment of St Mark's. In years to come, this would lead to ongoing strategic planning meetings. Indeed, many of these meetings would be held at the beginning of the year and would be attended by students, community representatives and the Kgosi.

It was also interesting to have some major sponsors and grant-givers, such as Michael O'Dowd from Anglo American Chairman's Fund, Caroline Tindall from JCI and many others, at these meetings.

One of my most exciting experiences was very early on, when we had started building that dormitory where the plans had been sketched in the sand by foot. It was R100 000 – a huge amount of money in those days. We could almost complete the first dormitory. It really was exciting.

St Mark's became hugely popular under the leadership

of Peter and Elisabeth Anderson. We were extremely fortunate to have them. They were a magnet pulling in retired teachers and volunteer students from overseas; they became the darlings of the donor world – because they had given up so much – a cosy life to start a school in the sticks.

But the popularity of the school led to problems. Our fundraising and building programmes could not keep up with the student demand. Remember that at that time many of the students were leaving Soweto because of the poor education being offered in the townships, and coming to the better schools, such as St Mark's. This meant that we did not have enough classroom accommodation for the students and so we had to resort to tents.

Mr Anderson reported at various council meetings that the tents were providing cover, but were not very good classrooms because of the wind and the dust. So we were urged to hurry up with the fundraising and building programmes.



Michael O'Dowd (right) was a regular visitor the school.



Theresa Morefe, Father Tsebe and Bishop le Feuvre

And the late 1980s were difficult times politically. The security police were raiding many homes, schools and institutions in the late 1980s. St Mark's did not go unnoticed. Indeed, visits were paid by the security police to the school: and they raided homes of staff members, confiscating what they felt were illegal books, pamphlets or other material.

At one stage, the student movement, COSAS, closed all the government schools down, and there was a slogan being chanted, "liberation before education". However, while the student movement closed down many schools, they insisted that St Mark's stay open, because of its community acceptance. This, of course, made the school a target again for security raids.

And who will forget the time when the water reservoir at Jane Furse ran dry? There was no running water at the school. I well remember the buckets and plastic containers standing around.

Despite the many trials and tribulations, we were overjoyed at the results which were obtained. The academic results were outstanding. I think of one excellent illustration – of Mamongae Mahlare who was part of St Mark's first matric

class in 1990. She came top in Lebowa in the Science Olympiad and was invited, with about twenty others, to represent South Africa at the International Youth Science Fortnight in London. Based on this, she was able to pursue her further studies, firstly at St Stithians, and then at Wits and Harvard University.

Although we started off under the Diocese of Pretoria, the diocese was split into two: the Diocese of Pretoria and the Diocese of St Mark. Bishop Ruston took over from Bishop Kraft as the chair of the Council and was followed by Bishop Philip le Feuvre, who became the bishop of the Diocese of St Mark, and hence chairman of St Mark's College.

One last word: the singing was truly joyous. The choirs of girls and boys used to make one's hair stand on end as they sang such beautiful songs. I remember *Lerato la Jesu*, which I think is my favourite, along with *Santa Morena*.



Bishop Ruston lays the foundation stone for the school, on St Mark's Day, 17th May, 1986