

Rev Robert Forrest

The first rector of Camden was the Rev Robert Forrest, but he did not stay to see the church of St. John's completed and consecrated.

Forrest was born in 1802 near Kendal in Westmorland, England and was educated at a local grammar school and at St Bees College in Cumberland, a new foundation for the training of non-graduate candidates for the ministry. He was ordained deacon by Bishop Howley of London on 23rd December 1827 and priested by Bishop Blomfield of London one year later. Blomfield had known him in the north and in 1831 recommended him to the Colonial Office for the headmastership of The King's School, Parramatta established in 1831 under the patronage of King William IV as a private boarding school for young gentlemen. In the same year Archdeacon Broughton, later Bishop, suggested the recruitment of men from St Bees and Lampeter for service in New South Wales.

Robert Forrest was appointed to a colonial chaplaincy in May 1831. He left England in September, together with his wife Jane, and reached Sydney in January 1832. Opening The King's School with 12 boys in February in a rented building in George Street Parramatta. The school quickly prospered and a large and permanent facility was built in 1834. However ill health led to his resignation in June 1839.

He was appointed incumbent of Campbelltown, to which Narellan was added in December. In April 1843 he was appointed to take charge of Camden, not as yet a distinct parish, and the as yet uncompleted church of St John's. The foundation stone of the church had been laid on the 3rd November 1840 by the Right Reverend William Grant Broughton. The location of this stone is not known.

Forrest purchased property at Elderslie where he made his home and conducted a small boarding school with 6 pupils. He was a gifted teacher and had the assistance of W.H. Kingston, the then Clerk of Petty Sessions Camden.

Robert Forrest found parochial life congenial and his health began to improve. He officiated at services in the school-church, dedicated in November 1835 at Narellan (next to St Thomas' 1884), and in a small classroom close to the Macarthur residence at Camden Park.

In January 1848 Robert Forrest was asked to return to The King's School which was in difficulty. At the time of his departure from Camden St John's was complete except for pulpit, seats and chancel fittings, but it was not until 7th June 1849 that the church was consecrated.

Forrest on his return to The Kings School had to struggle to revive it, and the effort again impaired his health. He was granted eighteen months leave in September 1853 and he and his wife returned to England. He died on 7th November 1854 at his birthplace. Jane, his wife, who had been his active helper in his school mastering days, died on 8th May 1877. He remained at Camden for 10 years until his appointment to Holy Trinity, the Garrison Church at the Rocks Sydney from 1st August 1858