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HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, BERRIMA

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Holy Trinity Church, Berrima

Pioneers have bequeathed to Australia a heritage of which every Australian is proud. Their fortitude, courage and generosity both in thought and action are an inspiration still. They followed the paths blazed by explorers and in the loneliness of the Australian bush built their homes. Throughout its history the Church of God has sought to heed Jesus Christ's command to take the Gospel to every creature. Wherever there was settlement there also was established a place of worship. Those who laboured for daily bread were nourished also with the Bread of Life. This is especially true of Berrima.

Although it is claimed that the Bong Bong, Berrima and Sutton Forest District was discovered as early as 1798, it was due principally to Hamilton Hume's explorations that it became more widely known and settled. Originally the main southern road passed through the townships of Bong Bong and Sutton Forest, but in the March of 1830 Surveyor-General T. L. Mitchell marked out a new road which avoided the steepness of the Mittagong Range, and passed through what later became known as Berrima. This venture determined the end of Bong Bong as a township and the beginning of Berrima. Its nearness to the Wingecarribee and its height above the banks were factors which led to the growth of Berrima as a settlement. Governor Ralph Darling approved of the site in May, 1831, and Surveyor W. R. Govett laid out the streets in 1832. By the year 1837 the Court House, gaol and bridge were under construction.

By the year 1826 John Layton, a catechist, was appointed to the districts of Sutton Forest, Bong Bong, and Mittagong. The Rev. Thomas Hassall, Rector of Cobbitty, by 1828 at the latest visited John Layton's congregations, probably each quarter, until 1831. On the 10th January, 1830, a weatherboard church was opened at Sutton Forest. In the year 1831 the Rev. John Vincent became the spiritual guide in the district. The Rev. G. Vidal succeeded him in the March of 1841. It is reported that George Vidal held services in the Berrima Court House. Preaching on the occasion of the first circuit court held at Berrima on the 14th April, 1841, he drew "attention to the disgrace to an assize town being without a Church". Efforts were made immediately to finance the erection of a place of worship. The Rev. J. S. Hassall, at one time incumbent of the Parish of Berrima, credits Samuel North with being the person mainly responsible for this move.

Edmund Blacket, the architect, was consulted, plans were prepared and by the December of 1844 tenders for the erection of a Church were called. Finally a Mr. Munro contracted to build a stone church of Gothic design for the sum of £900. On the 7th April, 1847, the foundation stone of the Church of Holy Trinity was laid. The clergyman in the district at this time was the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Sutton Forest.

Although the precise position of the foundation stone is unknown today, a report from the Sydney Morning Herald of the 23rd July, 1847, records certain of the facts associated with the occasion when it was laid. The report reads:—"Mr. Munro, the contractor, had buried this day (Wed. 14th July), in one of the stones a parchment paper with the following inscription:—

The Foundation Stone of
The Church of Holy Trinity
in the town of Berrima, in the County of Camden,
and Colony of New South Wales,
was laid on the 7th day of April, A.D. 1847

by

the Right Rev. Wm. Grant Broughton, Lord Bishop of Australia
In the 10th year of the reign of Her Most
Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria.
And the 1st Government of His Excellency
Sir Charles A. Fitzroy Knight.

Resident Clergyman: The Rev. William Stone.

Trustees of the Church: Samuel North Esq., Police Magistrate,
John Norton, Esq., Justice of Peace, Henry Molesworth Oxley, Esq.,
James Jerome Higgins, Esq., and William John Cordeaux, Esq.

Architect: Mr. Edmund Blacket.

Builder: Mr. William Munro.

Secretary to the Church Committee: Mr. Robert Forster".

It is thought by many and claimed by the Rev. J. S. Hassall, that Holy Trinity was the first church designed by the well-known architect Edmund Blacket. In a letter published in the Daily Telegraph, 2nd May, 1914, Mr. W. Donald makes some interesting comments concerning its construction. Apparently a poem, written by George Donald, a leading stonemason working on the building, was included with other documents within the foundations. Furthermore, he maintains that a wooden square used to set out the church and square the stones was made from a piece of oak from the "Victory", Lord Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Within two years the building, which was made from sandstone quarried from the banks of the Wingecarribee at the rear of the church, was completed. On the 9th June, 1849, the Rt. Rev. W. G. Broughton, assisted by the Rev. William Stone, consecrated the church in the presence of a congregation numbering about one hundred and fifty. The following mention of the ceremony appeared in Bishop Broughton's journal:—

"From Camden I proceeded to Berrima; and on Saturday, the 10th June, consecrated the Church of Holy Trinity, in that town, and afterwards the burial ground. It was a dull and cheerless day, yet the Church was completely filled, and, with much thankfulness, I added this chaste and commodious building to the number of holy sanctuaries of the Church of our Redeemer in this land."

On the 5th April, 1850, at a meeting of parishioners, Messrs. H. M. Oxley, J. J. Higgins, and R. C. Forster were elected wardens of the church.

It appears that the Rev. W. Stone was responsible for the conduct of Divine Service until the arrival of the first Rector, the Rev. J. J. Hassall in 1853. James Hassall, the son of the Rev. Thomas Hassall, and the grandson of the Rev. Samuel Marsden, married the niece of Lieut. John Oxley, an explorer and Surveyor-General during a period when Lachlan Macquarie was Governor of the Colony.

During J. S. Hassall's incumbency, the present Rectory was built. Originally he lived with his wife's relatives in the home of John Oxley, Esq., until a galvanised iron dwelling consisting of two rooms was erected nearer the church. It was not long, however, before a stone Rectory was seen standing in the midst of the natural beauty of the Australian bush on the banks of the Wingecarribee River. Though it has not been the dwelling place of clergy for many years, it remains church property, and is still known affectionately as "the old Rectory".

Over the years the following incumbents of Berrima, and later Moss Vale, were:

Rev. J. S. Hassell	1853-1873
Rev. J. D. Langley	1873-1875
Rev. E. Dixon	1875-1878
Rev. G. Sheppard	1878-1905
Rev. A. C. Mosley	1905-1911
Rev. C. Hughesdon	1911-1917
Rev. W. N. O'Neil	1917-1928
Rev. A. C. Perkins	1928-1935
Rev. R. C. Firebrace	1935-1937
Rev. H. G. S. Begbie	1937-1947
Rev. J. F. W. Mason	1947-1951
Rev. A. W. Prescott	1951-1963
Rev. Ralph Fraser	1963-

There is no extravagance in the Church of Holy Trinity. The conformity between the simplicity of its furnishings and architectural characteristics give to it the quiet but confident dignity felt by all who come within its walls. Its gentle stillness is eloquent of its charm.

The faithfulness, toil and magnanimity of many worshippers over the years have contributed to its beauty. Originally the church roof was thatched, but probably around 1902, due to the generosity of Mr. Ben Osborne, it was renewed with slates. The chairs now standing within the sanctuary and at the prayer desk were presented by the Powell family in 1887. In the previous year the sanctuary rails, brass lectern and prayer desk were given as a thank-offering by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Osborne. The Prayer Book on the Holy Table was presented in 1866 by W. J. Cordeaux, one of the first Trustees. The stone font was given in the year of consecration, 1849, by Charles Cowper, M.L.C. The oak pulpit was dedicated on the 31st January, 1915 in memory of Dr. G. P. Lambert and his wife. Dr. Lambert was the medical officer to the gaol and town during 1876-1904. He also served the church faithfully as churchwarden.

Although the blue ceiling studded with silver stars is probably an original decoration, the words of Isaiah, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee" were enscrollled over the sanctuary arch during the incumbency of the Rev. George Sheppard. During his term of office also the Sanctuary wall was tiled, and, due largely to the industry of the Ladies' Guild, the present single manual pipe organ was acquired for £110. The installation of electric light during the time of the Rev. A. C. Perkins replaced kerosene oil lamps. Some of these lamps may be seen in the vestry.

The offertory dish and large vases on the Holy Table were presented by Mr. R. White, and the brass cross by Mr. H. Landon. The Credence Table was given in memory of the late Mary Jane Finlayson. The Honour Roll was

erected in memory of those who served in the first World War. In 1948, because of the presence of white ants, the whole of the floor of the church was renewed. As recently as May, 1949, the Ladies' Guild carpeted the aisle, and due to the industry of Mrs. L. M. Brown, the Sanctuary floor was re-covered with similar material.

There stands within the vestry an old oak chest, presented to the church by Miss Gladys Blacket, grand-daughter of the architect, Edmund Blacket. Above it is the following inscription:—

“This oak chest was brought from England by Professor Gurney as a present to his sister, Miss Gurney, late of “Kambala”, Sydney.

It was originally in an old church in the village of Clavering, in Essex, where Miss Gurney's father was Rector, and was given to him by the Church authorities.

Its age is uncertain; but it is so old that it was originally held together with wooden nails, being before the days of steel or iron nails. (A few of them can still be seen).

Miss Gurney left it in her will to the donor, Miss Gladys Blacket”.

Not least among the beautiful features of the church are the stained-glass windows. At the eastern end of the church are three windows depicting the Resurrection of our Lord, His Baptism by John, and the story of the Good Shepherd. They were erected to the memory of James Powell by his wife. High in the western wall are three windows in memory of Lucy Osborne. Actually they form the single scene of our Lord's appearance to the women after His resurrection. Within the Sanctuary, in memory of Camden Galbraith McCourt, is a scene showing children in the presence of Jesus Christ. Also on the northern wall are windows representing Christ as the Good Shepherd, and the Light of the World. These were erected to the memory of Louisa Armfield.

On the right of the entrance door are another two windows in which our Lord is seen bearing the Cross, and Moses holding two tablets of stone. It is claimed that their style and glasswork indicate that they are about 200 years old. Apparently they were taken from an old church in Cornwall, known as St. Neot's, and were brought to Australia by a Mr. Tarrant, at one time a stained-glass artist. It was from him that they were purchased and included in the Church of Holy Trinity.

Just as the furnishings, windows and tablets enable us to perceive the devotion of other people in other days, so does the mind conceive visions of the un-named and often unknown who have served and worshipped God in His House. They made it beautiful by the toil of their hands and sanctified it by the sincerity of their prayers. The colleagues of many incumbents, churchwardens, organists and their associates, choirs who led the congregations in song.

faithful women of the guilds, teachers of little children, and bell-ringers who sent the call to worship across the hills, each and all have served their Lord. The harvest of the seed they sowed is reaped today.

For over one hundred years Almighty God has been worshipped in the Church of Holy Trinity. May the generations for centuries to come serve Him with deep devotion and continue to be nourished in this His Sanctuary with the Bread of Life.

Some additional notes by Miss A. Harper

The Rev. John Mason was transferred to Victoria in 1951 and was succeeded by the Rev. Alwyn Prescott who remained until 1963.

During Mr. Prescott's ministry the 110th Anniversary of the Church was celebrated and a new Holy Table was dedicated, built of oak matching the already existing furnishings. The cost of this was subscribed by lovers of Holy Trinity, mostly descendants of, or former parishioners.

The flags (memorials by the Galbraith and Reynolds families) on the Honour Board were also renewed. A window to the memory of Mrs. Lilian Brown was dedicated in 1961.

In 1964 electric wall heaters were installed as a gift by members of the Wrightson family and fellow workers.

Mr. and Mrs. Blacket of Bowral donated a memorial tablet in memory of the architect, Edmund Blacket and this was placed in the entrance porch and a photo of the architect in the vestry.

During 1963-64 photos of past rectors and assistants have been hung in the vestry and this is a source of much interest to visitors, as well as parishioners.

A Prayer Book, nearly 200 years old, was presented to the church last year. It formerly belonged to the grandparents of the Rev. Edwin Dixon, the second resident rector of Berrima.

The Service Book in use on the Holy Table, given in 1865 by Mrs. W. Cordeaux was replaced in 1963 by Mrs. Arthur Cordeaux.

Margaretta Mary Woodriff ★ ———
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Extract from the Church of England Historical Society Journal, June, 1964.