

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

SCOTS' CHURCH, BERRY

Centenary

of the

Charge of Berry, N.S.W.



1878 ***** 1978

A Brief Account of the Presbyterian Church in Berry

In the southern Illawarra region of N.S.W. nestled between the Pacific Ocean and Coolangatta Mountain to the east, and the Illawarra Range with the prominent peaks of Woodhill and Cambewarra Mountains to the west lies the picturesque district of Berry.

Originally named Broughton Creek, the area is rich with the romance of early Australian history. It was first explored on land by a party led by Surveyor George Evans in 1812. In January, 1822, the colourful Scottish surgeon turned businessman and adventurer, Alexander Berry, took special note of the potential of the country surrounding the mouth of the Shoalhaven River while on board the ship *Snapper* during a coastal voyage of exploration. Berry and his business partner (later to be his brother-in-law) Edward Wollstonecraft secured an initial grant of 10,000 acres from the crown at Shoalhaven on condition that they would maintain up to 100 convicts free of cost to the government.

Alexander Berry arrived at Coolangatta with his party on board the small 15 ton cutter *Blanche* on 21st June, 1822, to establish the first permanent European settlement in southern Illawarra. This was the nucleus of what was to become the great Coolangatta Estate comprising 70,000 acres by 1842 which was destined to play a very influential role in the lives of the Broughton Creek settlers until the early 1900's. At Alexander's invitation his three brothers and two unmarried sisters arrived from Scotland and took up residence at Coolangatta in 1836. The Berrys were of the Presbyterian communion, and David in particular, who outlived the others, became a much loved and highly esteemed member of the Presbyterian congregation and a generous benefactor to his Church in particular, to the other denominations and the community as a whole.

*Written for the Berry Charge Centenary Committee by the Rev. D. E. Hawkins,
Minister of Kiama, presently Interim Moderator of Berry and a former Student Home
Missionary stationed at that Charge.*

*The writer gratefully acknowledges the assistance given in locating source material by
Mrs. Norma Hart, Librarian of the Ferguson Memorial Library of the Presbyterian
Church in N.S.W.*

D. E. H.
May, 1978

The earliest Presbyterian services of worship in the district were conducted by the Rev. John Tait, M.A., who arrived in Wollongong in 1837 and is known to have itinerated as far south as Coolangatta. Infrequent services were held thereafter but it was not until the Rev. Dr. Wm. Grant was established on the Shoalhaven in 1853 that services of worship were held with any degree of regularity. The Rev. Dr. John Kinross of Kiama took an active interest in Broughton Creek from the time of the commencement of his ministry in 1858 visiting as often as possible on horseback. The district was attached to the Charge of Gerringong until 1861 when it was transferred to Shoalhaven (Nowra).

The population residing on the Coolangatta Estate had grown considerably through the policy implemented by David Berry of giving former employees and new settlers the opportunity to share farm or rent holdings within the Estate. By 1870 there were 400 tenants. Presbyterians from among these and the many other free settlers now in the area desired regular services of worship and set about securing a resident minister at Broughton Creek.

On 22nd January, 1878, the Presbytery of Illawarra met 'pro re nata' at Kiama to receive the following petition, as extracted from the official Presbytery minutes: "A petition from the Presbyterian residents of Broughton Creek district was laid on the table praying that a new ministerial charge may be formed in that district. The petition was signed by 88 heads of families in that neighbourhood representing their locality as being distant 8 to 12 miles from the nearest place of worship on either side, and that the Rev. Mr. Grant having so many other stations was unable to officiate there oftener than once in six weeks, being thus removed from regular sabbath ordinances in their own church, they were apprehensive of many joining other communions or becoming estranged from the means of grace.

Messrs. William Thorburn, John Boxsell and Lewis McIntyre appeared as commissioners in support of the petition. They pointed to the numerous and increasing population of the place and the unanimous feeling that prevailed for the regular preaching of the Gospel amongst them."

The Presbytery received the petition and deputed two of its members, the Rev. John Wilson and Mr. John Macarthur, to go to Broughton Creek and meet with the people there following divine service in the school house at 11.00 a.m. on Saturday, 2nd February. The deputation reported back to the Presbytery at its next meeting on 5th March in the most favourable terms. They confirmed all the commissioners had said earlier and stated that the large congregation was ready to contribute the necessary funds to support a minister as soon as the Presbytery formed a new and distinct charge in their area. The report of the deputation was received and after due consideration the Presbytery declared the district of Broughton Creek to be a separate charge under the designation of Broughton. Arrangements were made for the calling of a meeting of the congregation in the school house for the purpose of signing a call to a minister. The clerk was instructed to draw up a call in the prescribed form and have the notice of meeting published in the *Kiama Independent* and in the *Shoalhaven Reporter*.



The Rev. J. W. and Mrs. Dymock.

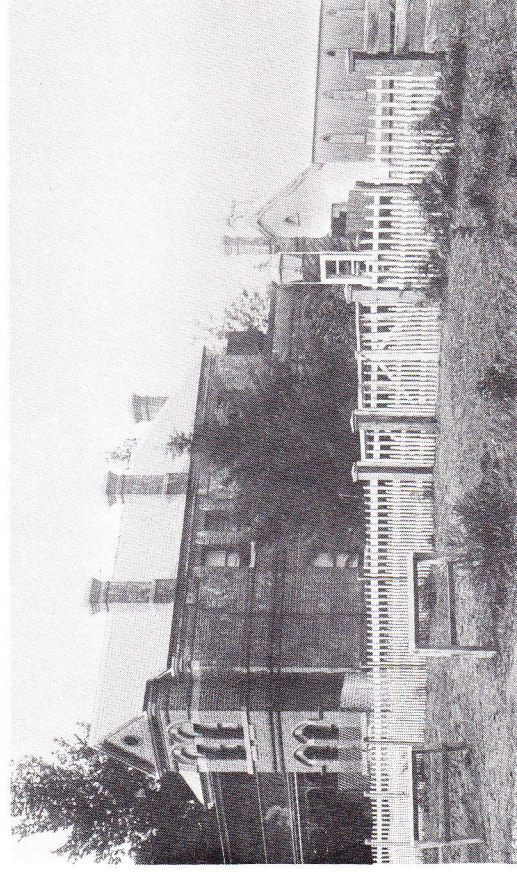
The Rev. J. W. Dymock of Sutton Forest accepted a call and was duly inducted as the first minister of the new charge centred on Broughton Creek township and including the centres of Meroo, Coolangatta, Kangaroo Valley, Kangaroo Mount, Wattamolla, and Cambewarra which was detached to become part of Shoalhaven in 1891. *The Australian Witness* dated June 15, 1878, carried this item: "The newly established charge of Broughton Creek to which Mr. Dymock was translated from Sutton Forest is now beginning to assume the form of an established congregation. The plan of operation has been drawn up and so far carried into effect, as to allow all the different parts of the charge one or two diets of worship."

Mr. Dymock proved to be a devoted pastor and able administrator. During his ten year ministry at Broughton he laid a sound foundation upon which the charge could consolidate. *The Scrutineer* of September, 1878, when reporting that tenders had been called for the erection of a Presbyterian Church in Kangaroo Valley added . . . "Readers will be pleased to hear that the Rev. J. Dymock is very successful in this district, and that he has gained the love and respect of all classes of the community."

As the main purpose of this booklet is to highlight the events connected with the establishment of the charge it is not possible to give a coverage of the work of the other dedicated and energetic ministers who have served at Berry since Mr. Dymock. Their names are recorded at the back of the publication.

Mr. David Berry saw the need for an adequate residence for the minister and gifted the stately two-storey brick Manse to the Church in 1883 with two acres of land on the hill in Victoria Street overlooking the town which within a few years would bear his name. The land alone was valued at £500. This grand old gentleman who had done so much for his Church at both the local and State levels was called to his eternal reward at Coolangatta on 23rd September, 1889, aged 94 years. The management of the Estate fell into the capable hands of John Hay (later Sir John Hay) a near relative of the Berrys who, with his wife, continued to give solid support to the Presbyterian cause.

For the first six years of the life of the charge services of worship and Sabbath school in Berry were held in the school house and other venues, but on 20th March, 1884, a new building situated behind the Manse designed to serve the dual purpose of church and Presbyterian school was opened and dedicated in the presence of a very large congregation drawn from a wide area. The Rev. Dr. Robert Steel of Sydney preached at the opening service. The cost of the building was £476 10s 4d which was paid in full by public subscription.



Presbyterian Church and Manse, Berry, about 1909.

At the time of the Jubilee Celebrations in 1928 the commemorative booklet noted that, "The Parish of Berry is a fairly large one, embracing (in addition to Berry) Broughton Village, Jaspers Brush, Coolangatta, Beaumont, Kangaroo Valley and Foxground, at which places services are held at regular intervals." Services were also held at Meroo and Broughton Vale. However, by the 1930's the population of the district was in decline due to several factors including the emergence of larger farms by the joining of smaller holdings which were no longer viable, a degree of mechanisation reducing the manual labour requirement and poor prices for primary products generally. Kangaroo Valley was particularly hard hit. Many Presbyterians had migrated to the Clarence and Tweed River districts in search of better prospects.

The Sydney Morning Herald of 3rd July, 1934, noted that the Kangaroo Valley Presbyterian Church was now "a deserted rural church".

Despite the generally depressed economy of the period there was a strong desire amongst Berry Presbyterians for a more adequate Church building — the old church on the hill had long been in a poor state of repair. A splendid vision was realised when the Scots' Church on the corner of Alexandra and Victoria Streets was opened and dedicated on 29th August, 1934, at a cost of £1,356 11s 0d. The history of the main stained-glass windows at the northern end is told by the wording on a wall plaque: "The Original Windows of Scots' Church, Sydney. Erected 1823 by Rev. Dr. John Dunmore Lang. Gifted to Scots' Church, Berry, August 28th, 1934 with Porch Windows".

Another plaque on the western wall tells a wonderful story of service by a member of the congregation: "In memory of Miss Mary McLean. Missionary in India for 31 years, where she served her Church in the cause of her Master with untiring ability and devotion. Born at Bolong, N.S.W. in 1860 — Sailed for India in 1891 — Prior to being sent abroad by the Women's Missionary Association she was a member of this Church and held the distinction of being the first Australian born missionary from the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales. She doth rest from her labours".

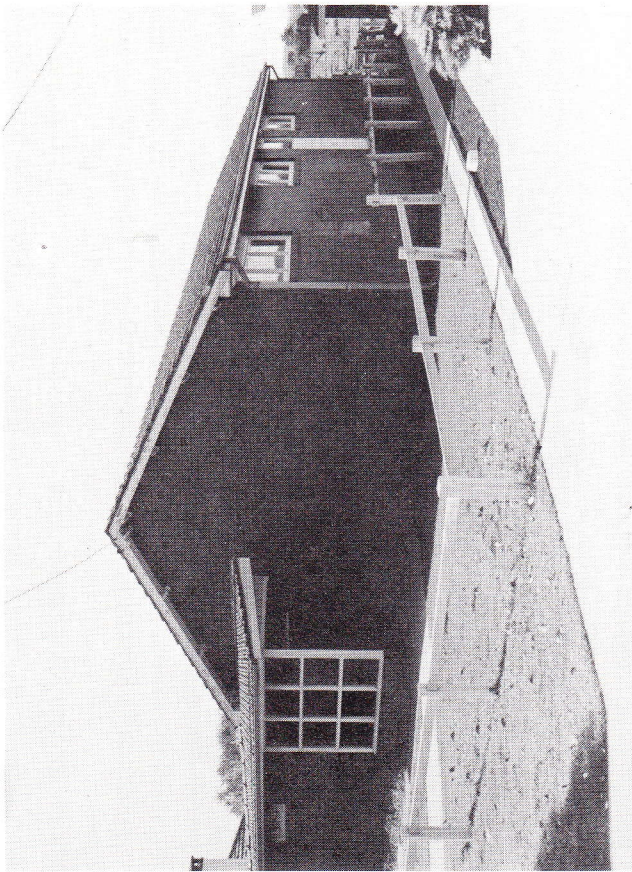
By 1953 costs had risen to a point where the Berry congregation could no longer support an ordained ministry and the Home Mission Department was requested to staff the charge until things improved financially. Overall this arrangement has worked quite well. During the appointment period of one Student Minister, Mr. C. C. McKeith, the fine brick Church Hall was built in Alexandra Street and opened and dedicated on 25th July, 1958. In the same year the old Manse was sold as it was considered too expensive to repair and maintain and the new Manse built next door. The latter was opened and dedicated on 26th November, 1959. The new facilities gave the congregation a great boost, but the burden of liquidating the debts on them weighed heavily upon succeeding appointees. It fell to the Church ladies to repay the debts over a 12 year period by catering in the Hall for various local organisations and functions. A plaque on the Hall wall gives credit to these ladies for their splendid achievement.



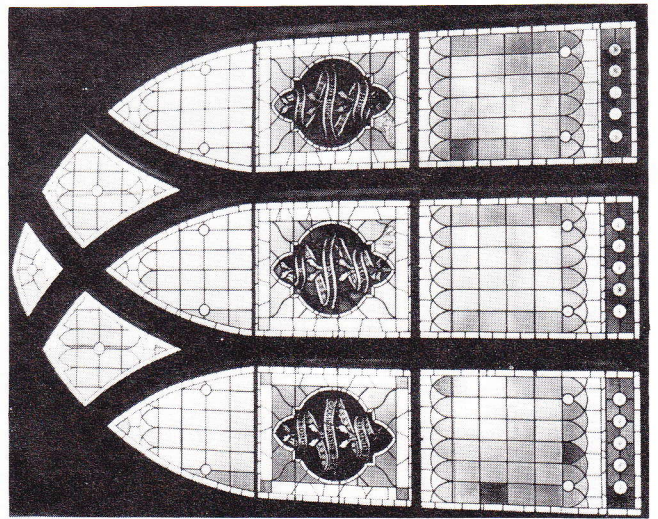
The present Manse with the old Manse beside it.

At this time of the celebration of the Centenary of the Charge of Berry its people can look back on a fine record of service to Almighty God. It has never been a strong charge numerically speaking — communicant membership has not at any period exceeded 100 — but its people have been possessed of a strong sense of independence and determination to do God's work well but often in their own particular way. Berry Presbyterians and their kinsfolk in the district are community minded and not afraid to work hard in accordance with their convictions. The names of many members come to mind readily who have been in recent years or are at present an inspiration to others in the charge, but it is perhaps sufficient to mention two as typical of the best: the immediate past Session Clerk, the late W. J. B. (Berry) McClelland, and the present Clerk, Angus Miller.

With the above qualities and the as yet small but definite increase in the population of the still delightfully rural town through the arrival of new residents in the homes appearing on subdivisions, the Berry Presbyterians look forward to the next one hundred years with the same quiet trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as did their pioneering forefathers.



Presbyterian Church Hall, Berry.



Original Window from the Scots' Church, Sydney, 1823, now in the Berry Church.

MINISTERS OF THE BERRY CHURCH

Rev. John W. Dymock	1878-1888
Rev. Robert Jackson,	1888-1893
Rev. R. N. McLean	1893
Rev. Donald McLennan	1894-1905
Rev. David Smith,	1905-1907
Rev. J. N. Robertson	1907-1910
Rev. J. F. McAlister.	1912-1914
Rev. R. B. Garner	1914-1917
Rev. J. S. Scott.	1918-1921
Rev. James Hendry	1921-1924
Rev. W. Duffy	1924-1927
Rev. J. F. Christian	1928-1932
Rev. D. L. Paterson.	1933-1939
Rev. G. Trevor Hughes.	1939-1944
Rev. Alex. Alexander.	1944-1948
Rev. A. S. Brooks.	1948-1950
Rev. F. Druery	1951-1953
Mr. J. D. Penman (Student Home Missionary)	1953-1955
Rev. Ernest Johnson (H.M. Supply Minister)	1956-1957
Mr. C. C. McKeith (Student Home Missionary)	1957-1961
Mr. D. E. Hawkins (Student Home Missionary)	1961-1964
Mr. G. Fintleman (Student Home Missionary)	1964
Rev. G. A. Morrow (Inducted Minister)	1965-1972
Rev. G. W. Wilson (Inducted Minister)	1973-1974
Mr. D. Smith (Student)	1975
Mr. I. H. Fairbank (Home Missionary)	1978-

As a complete list of the academic degrees held by the above men is not available at the time of writing, none is shown. However, several were noted for their scholarship having gained distinction of being a Master of Arts.