

INTERESTING CHURCH HISTORY.

Muswellbrook, Denman and Merriwa.

TRIALS OF EARLY WORSHIPPERS.

The following interesting article dealing with the history of the Anglican Church at Muswellbrook, Denman and Merriwa, will appear in the October issue of the "Denman Parish Quarterly." Permission to publish the review of the development of the church in the district is kindly given by the Rev. W. Holmes, Rector of Denman.

In 1838 the Rev. John Morse arrived in Scone, and his parish extended over the areas at present comprised in the parishes of Murrurundi, Gundy, Aberdeen, Muswellbrook, Denman and Merriwa. In the present parish of Denman the settlement was at Merton and divine service was occasionally held in a wooden building used as a court house. There was only the one diocese—the Diocese of Australia—presided over by Dr. William Grant Broughton. It is interesting to note that the Bishop of Australia visited the Merton settlement on February 2nd., 1840, and baptised the infant son of Christian Robert and Henrietta Smith, who were working for Captain Ogilvie. This is the first baptism recorded in the old register, now kept in Newcastle. The parish of Muswellbrook was made a separate charge in 1843, and the Rev. William Gore appointed as incumbent, and so the present area of the parish of Denman was included in the parish of Muswellbrook. The Bishop of Australia visited Merton again on July 20th., 1843, when he baptised Ann Maria Peberdy, as well as conducting divine service. In 1848, the Rev. S. G. Boodle became incumbent of Muswellbrook, and visited and held services at Merton in a wooden building, used as a court house. Dr. William Tyrrell, the first Bishop of Newcastle, who had been installed in the Cathedral in Newcastle on January 30th., 1848, visited Merton for the first time on Friday, May 19th., 1848, and held service in the court house. Bricks had been made some time before for a church,

and the Bishop talked over ways and means with the treasurer, Mr. George Blaxland, so that the work could be carried on. A year after Mr. Blaxland was accidentally killed by the overturning of his carriage, as he was driving down the steep bank of the river, opposite his own house. However, in 1850, the brick Church was built in the middle of the cemetery, on top of the hill, overlooking the little township of Merton, and was consecrated on March 20th., 1851. It was dedicated under the name of St. Matthias, and was enlarged in 1861. In 1861 a site for a church was given at Mount Dangar by Mr. William Town and a church, of sawn timber, was built at a cost of £150, in 1863. Merriwa and Cassilis were separated from Muswellbrook parish in 1860, the Rev. D. G. Bird being the first Incumbent and the Rev. W. S. Wilson, the second Incumbent, in 1862. The Rev. J. A. Greaves was Incumbent of Muswellbrook, in 1857, the Rev. F. D. Bode, in 1859, and the Rev. W. E. White, in 1860. A very nice wooden school was built at what was then the new township of Denman, on a site given by Mr. G. A. F. Kibble, in 1861. A Church School was commenced at Wybong in 1871 and opened in 1873. In 1870 the land of the Merton settlement, having passed into the ownership of one person, many of the remaining inhabitants determined to move away to the Government planned township of Denman. The brick church, in the middle of the cemetery, on the hill at Merton, was in an unsafe condition and the once nice church stood desolated with scarcely

safe condition and the once nice church stood desolated, with scarcely a house around it.

A very influential meeting was held on the occasion of the visit of the Bishop of Newcastle (Dr. Tyrrell) and

the inhabitants of Denman and neighbourhood determined to build a new stone church in Denman and abandon the Merton site. About £600 was promised, and plans were drawn by J. Horbury Hunt, Esq., architect and civil engineer of Sydney, of a good plain, substantial building. The lowest tender being £900, rather startled the people and it was proposed to bring down the cost by leaving out the bell turret and vestry. A start was made in 1871 on a contract for £720 and it was hoped that it would be finished by the end of 1872. The contractor, however, after doing the foundation and base course, gave up the work. Another contractor was found, who took up the work on November 30th., 1872, and on Monday, December 2nd., 1872, the Bishop (Dr. Tyrrell) paid a visit to Denman and laid the corner stone in the north-east corner, being the base of the column of the arch leading into the vestry. Apparently the contractor who took up the work and completed it did so at an estimated cost of £942/8/6, because £334/14/6 was paid to the fund in 1872 and £445/10/3 in 1873, leaving, it was stated, a balance to be found of £152 3s 9d. It was decided this time to go on and complete the original plan, with belfrey turret, vestry and every appliance, at the earnest desire of the Rev. W. E. White, the Incumbent. The contract did not include window frames and many other fittings which had to be supplied by the building committee. The windows were ordered from England, stained glass having been given for all the windows in the chancel by Mrs. James White and one of the side windows by Mrs. A. Munro, and executed by Messrs. Lavers, Barrand and Westlake, of London.

The Church was so far completed that divine service was held in it for the first time on April 5th. (Easter Day), 1874, and, apparently, from that time onward. The Church was completed in November, 1874. The debt on the building now stood at £442/8/-, so

that evidently £290/4/3 more had been spent on fittings, i.e., bells, seats, and other equipment, thus making a total expenditure on the Church of £1232 12s 9d. An organ was ordered from England and it was hoped that it would be set up in time for the consecration.

The Bishop consecrated the Church under the name of St. Matthias on Thursday, November 4th., 1875, and held a confirmation in it and presided over a meeting at which arrangements were made for the liquidation of the debt on the building and the final separation of the district from the parish of Muswellbrook.

Denman was started on its course as a separate cure of souls on January 1st., 1876, the Rev. C. M. Mills being appointed Incumbent. Wooden Churches were built at Giant's Creek and Spring Creek in 1877, and a stone Church at Widden Creek, in 1878. The names of those who have had charge of the parish of Denman are:—C. M. Mills, 1876; H. S. D. Portus, 1903; M. G. H. Garbett, 1907; A. G. King, 1911; G. W. Brown, 1916; K. S. Single, 1918; R. D. Pontifex, 1920; L. Ayscough, 1921; B. C. Wilson, 1925; W. Holmes, 1926.

To celebrate the 60th. anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the Parish Church, Denman, the Bishop of Newcastle will visit the parish and preach on that occasion.