

Saint Matthias

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus chose twelve disciples. It was a highly symbolic act. As a people set apart by God, Israel had been a unity of twelve tribes led by twelve influential patriarchs. As the 'new Israel' would be constituted by the followers of Jesus, the setting apart of twelve disciples was a significant gesture. Following Jesus' ascension, the first act of the disciples was to restore their number to twelve after Judas Iscariot took his own life in remorse for betraying Jesus to the authorities. The replacement needed to have been with the disciples from Jesus' baptism by John, to have shared in their evolving ministry and to have encountered the resurrected Christ. There were two candidates; one of them was named Matthias. The Acts of the Apostles records that a group of believers numbering 120, led by Peter, then prayed: 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' A ballot was held and Matthias was chosen. There are no subsequent mentions of him in the Bible and nothing is known reliably of his fate. A formal day of commemoration on 24 February was set down in the Roman Calendar during the eleventh century. Although he is an enigmatic figure, Matthias was the only disciple 'chosen by his peers' and was clearly a man of commitment and conviction who inspired and encouraged the first Christian community. He was the first Christian to have his leadership potential recognised by the Church. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer provides the following prayer for use on the Feast of St Matthias:

O Almighty God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles: Grant that thy Church, being always preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Currawang: Church and Community

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Foreword

Currawang: Church and Community

In this book Paul Wheeldon has succeeded in making a highly informed and very readable contribution to the history of Anglicanism in Australia. The subject is one that has attracted growing attention in recent decades partly because it is recognised that the church has a history that is not only worth telling but is also in many ways distinct from that of the rest of the Anglican communion. Large numbers of books and journal articles have appeared, some taking the form of biographies of churchmen and women, others dealing either with the church as a whole, or its various dioceses. Important too is the growing tendency to write parish histories and it is in this sphere that Paul Wheeldon's contribution lies. Some may dismiss studies of individual churches as being of no real significance, but this is far from the truth, as the present book shows. It is in the parish church that most Anglicans practise their faith and it is vital to any understanding of Anglicanism that we should know as much as possible about them. Only by doing so can we really understand what Anglicanism is all about. By viewing Anglicanism from below we can gain a richer appreciation of its complexities.

That Paul grasps this important fact shines through in his writing. A substantial part of the book is taken up with a narrative which flows smoothly and carries the reader with it. The arrangement is chronological, opening with the discovery of Lake George during Governor Macquarie's day and then moving on to show how settlement developed in the region beyond. Pastoralists moved in and established a flourishing wool industry. They were followed by copper miners who left once the deposits were exhausted leaving pastoralism once more in the ascendancy. Christianity appeared early in the piece, the first Anglican service being held as far back as 1818 when Macquarie visited the area accompanied by the Reverend Robert Cartwright. Paul shows how the Church of England gradually took shape once settlers arrived, clergy were appointed and the Diocese of Goulburn was brought into being. These developments are explored in careful detail that reflects the author's deep knowledge of the region which stems in part from longstanding personal acquaintance with it.

As happened so often in outlying areas worship had for long to be conducted by whatever means were available. It often took some time before church buildings could be constructed and this was certainly true of the region with which this book is concerned. Not until 1860 did churches begin to materialise and it was not until February 1874 that the foundation stone of St Matthias, Currawang was laid after the village had been established. The event was one of rejoicing and the author makes skilful use of carefully selected quotations from the local press to describe in intimate detail the service that was held to mark the occasion, in the process investing it with a sense of immediacy. He does the same in connection with the opening of the building in April 1875, shedding further light on the way in which worship was conducted. He provides us with a picture of the building itself and then goes on to show how the church subsequently evolved. By this means he builds up an illuminating picture of the life and development of a small church in rural New South Wales. Major events receive special attention and due attention is paid to the difficulties that sometimes arose. This is a balanced and carefully crafted picture based on research into a range of original sources including, interestingly enough, gravestones which are photographed for the reader to see.

This, then, is no mere institutional history. Rather it is a study of those who worked so productively for the church and breathed life into it. Attention is naturally paid to the dedicated clergy who braved the hardships of life far away from the comforts of city life. But the Anglican church would never have reached the heights it did had it not been for the support it received from the men and women who were born here or in the United Kingdom. Many who were to be found among the migrants or the local born belonged to the Church of England and gave freely of themselves to their church. Paul features them in his narrative. This is not unusual but what is a distinguishing feature of this book is the detail with which it treats such people outside the narrative. Quite a substantial part of the book is devoted to members of the laity who are listed alphabetically and provided with biographical details. This is a valuable exercise, one result of which is to show that support for the church was more broad-based than is often supposed by those who write about Anglicanism. It was only natural that support should have been forthcoming from the graziers. More interesting were the occupations of other worshippers. The author has not been able to provide information in every case but among those whose occupations are cited were artisans of various kinds, a former woollen

weaver who was transported to New South Wales as a convict, a dealer and a motor mechanic. The church clearly had an appeal that was quite widespread. This suggests that we need to think afresh about the social composition of a church which is sometimes identified with the upper echelons of society. Books like the present one arouse all sorts of new ideas and point to the need for further research into the church as a whole.

By dealing with the wider community Paul Wheeldon has also made a valuable contribution to the burgeoning and highly popular field of local history. Those interested in the history of the region will find much of value in his writing, beginning with the early discoveries and going on to the period in which the area was turned to productive use. The list of church goers provides information of value not only to students of Anglicanism but also to genealogists and local historians. By treating his subject in this way Paul has enhanced his book's value making it one that has the capacity to attract a wide readership. It is also one to which historians of Anglicanism in Australia should turn when they come to write the long-overdue social history of the church. Hopefully it will encourage others to write the history of their local church with a similar end in view. This, then, is a work of immediate and potential importance made the more so by the care that has gone into writing it and the thoroughness with which research of an extremely demanding kind has been conducted. Gratitude is due to the author for his unstinting efforts.

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1 The discovery of Lake George

James Meehan, a surveyor, and Charles Throsby, a surgeon and pastoralist, set out from Throsby's home at Glenfield near Campbelltown in March 1818 with the intention of discovering an overland route to Jervis Bay, opening up the southern tablelands. They came to the forbidding Shoalhaven gorges and decided to split up their party. Throsby reached the coast while Meehan, pursuing a course southward across the tableland, came upon the open country beyond Bungonia. He discovered Lake Bathurst on 3 April 1818 and the Goulburn Plains. Two years later Throsby again arranged an expedition into the Goulburn Plains entrusting the superintendence of the road party to his servant, Joseph Wild, who was 'very usefull [sic] (and) intelligent in the woods.'¹ Wild had already shown his excellent bushcraft when he accompanied Throsby on the Jervis Bay expedition.

Wild and his two companions reached 'Weereewa' (Lake George) on 19 August 1820 but news of their success did not reach Throsby for more than a week as the party travelled as far as Bungendore. Throsby wrote to Governor Macquarie on 25 August 1820 informing him of the discovery of another 'large' lake, called by the natives, "Wee-ree-waa" which was south west of the lake discovered by Meehan in 1818. The success of the expedition was quickly 'looked as a prelude to a much more important discovery ... of a considerable river called by the natives Mur-rum-bid-gie, two days journey from the lake.'²

2 The first Christian service at Lake Bathurst

Governor Macquarie wanted to see for himself the 'new country' which had been discovered well to the south-west of the settled areas around Sydney.

Friday 27 Octr.

At the distance of about 4 miles from it, and from the top of a hill on the left of the road, we had a partial view of the great lake, which even at that distance looked very fine. The last 4 miles to the lake was through fine open forest land or rich plains (this was a very beautiful tract of fine open forest land, but chiefly clear of timber & rich land – I therefore called it Campbell Plains in honour of Mrs Macquarie) and at 1 pm we reached the north east shore of it, but where we could only see about one half of it. At this point however we were all most highly gratified and delighted with this noble expanse of water, and the surrounding scenery.³

It is highly possible that Macquarie traversed the Currawang district, following the ridges surrounding the lake on the east side towards what is now the village of Bungendore. From north to south the lake was about seventeen miles long and from east to west approximately seven miles across at its widest point.

Saturday 28 Octr.

We sat down to dinner today at ½ past 5, and after dinner we drank a bumper toast to the success of the future settlers of the shores of Lake George, which name I have given to this grand and magnificent sheet of water in honor of His present Majesty. We drank tea early and went to bed at ½ past 9.⁴

Macquarie returned to Lake Bathurst from Lake George on Sunday 29 October 1820. He wrote the following entry in his journal:

Sunday 29th Octr.

At 4 pm the whole of our party, including our servants, carters &c.&c. being assembled in, and immediately under the fly of my large tent (which had been left standing here) the Reverend Robert Cartwright performed Divine Worship, and gave us a very excellent appropriate sermon, strongly impressing the justice, good policy, and expediency of civilizing the aborigines, or black natives of the country and settling them in townships. We dined at 6 o'clock, drank tea at ½ past 7 and went to bed at 9 o'clock.⁵

The party travelling with Macquarie and Cartwright included a number of notable figures in the colony. Major Henry Colden Antill (1779–1852) was aide-de-camp to Governor Macquarie. Lieutenant Hector Macquarie (1794–1845) was the Governor's nephew. He returned to Britain with the Macquaries in 1822. James Meehan (1774–1826) was the Assistant Surveyor General under John Oxley. Meehan was the discoverer of Lake Bathurst in 1818 and was responsible for the naming of Goulburn which Governor Macquarie subsequently ratified. [Goulburn was named after Henry Goulburn who was then the Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies.] Charles Throsby (1777–1828) served as a surgeon in the Royal Navy. Resident in Bong Bong, he engaged in a number of important inland journeys of exploration. In April 1821 Throsby crossed the site of Canberra and discovered the Murrumbidgee River. Joseph Wild (1773–1847) arrived in New South Wales as a convict in 1797 and worked for Charles Throsby. He accompanied Throsby on many tours of exploration. He was the discoverer of Lake George in August 1820 and was the first man to be buried in Bong Bong church cemetery. John Thomas Bigge (1780–1843) was sent to the colony in September 1819 to inquire into its administration. He returned to Britain in February 1821. Thomas Hobbes Scott (1783–1860) accompanied Bigge to the colony as his secretary. On returning to England he was made deacon and ordained priest in 1821. Scott was appointed the first archdeacon in the colony of New South Wales on 6 May 1825, serving until the end of 1828. William Cordeaux (1792–1839) arrived in the colony from England in 1818. He was the commissioner tasked with dividing the colony into counties and parishes. John Oxley (1783–1828) served in the Royal Navy before coming to NSW in 1812. He was appointed Surveyor General. He made his mark as an explorer of rivers beyond Bathurst and around Moreton Bay. Bigge's party also included Charles Fraser, the colonial botanist, and a Doctor Hill of whom no information has survived.⁶

3 Early European settlement

European settlement of the district south and south-west of Goulburn followed soon after its discovery. Records from the period include orders for land and promises of land in the immediate vicinity of Lake George within a few years. They were to be confirmed in due course by the deeds of grant to the promises of their legal representatives. On the eastern side of the lake an area of 2,000 acres was granted to James and Francis Cooper on 11 July 1835, but it was in pursuance of an order which had been made on 1 May 1824 in favour of Robert Cooper. The land was known as 'Willeroo' and ran to around 15,000 acres. In 1894, Patrick Hill Osborne, who owned 'Curraooley' (near Bungendore), bought 11,000 acres of 'Willeroo' from the estate of Sarah Cooper. The remaining property was retained by Robert Cowley Cooper. This property was named 'Pylara'.

'Kenny's Point' on the north-eastern end of the lake perpetuates a name long associated with Lake George. On the opposite side of Allianoyonyiga Creek to Cooper's 2,000 acre grant, an area of 1,000 acres was promised to Francis Kenny on 27 August 1825 and confirmed by Crown Grant to him on 31 August 1838. Even earlier, on 2 June 1824, he had been promised 120 acres on the point which still bears his name. According to the 1828 census another Kenny named John resided on Cooper's property at 'Currowong'. Francis Kenny was the son of James Kenny, the first Roman Catholic school teacher in Australia, who arrived in the *Boddington* in 1793. Kenny's homestead was the scene of the first Mass said on the Goulburn Plains by the pioneering Roman Catholic priest, Father John Therry, in 1833.

It was as early as September 1828 that the surveyor Major Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855) reported that three trigonometric base lines had been laid down in the Colony, two in the vicinity of Botany Bay and one at the north end of Lake George, a mile in length. The work was carried out in connection with the production of the map of the 'Nineteen Counties' which was published in 1835. This map has great historical import.