

**The beginning and progress of the Kerang Presbyterian Church written by James Thompson,
born in Bendigo 1859 came to Kerang 1877, died in Bendigo 2nd Dec, 1945.**

In the easier times the Victorian Government granted free sites for the erection of Church Buildings. One such site was applied for and granted for that purpose to the Presbyterian people of Kerang, but what date I do not know, or who the applicant or applicants were. Probably it would be either the Rev. James Nish of St. Andrews Bendigo, or Mr. Alexander Duncan Fraser, Saddler of Fitzroy Street Kerang or perhaps both. However this information should be recorded in the books of the Presbytery of Castlemaine since changed to Bendigo. The trustees who were appointed at that time were the Rev. James Nish of St. Andrews Bendigo, Alexander Duncan Fraser, saddler Kerang, Angus Adam Amos Station Manager of Gannawarra and ---- Cornish, I don't know his Christian name or his vocation. The trustees sold the site to Mr. David Hawthorne for the purpose of erecting a general store and other necessary buildings for the sum of 400 pounds sterling, 25 pounds of which the trustees purchased another site in the north end of Nolan Street whereon to erect a Church. The remaining 375 pounds were placed in a church fund to be used in the erection of a Church on the condition that the congregation when ready to build would raise an equal sum pound for pound, and later it will be seen what a wise condition that was. I do not know the date on which the sale was affected but that should be found recorded in the books of the Presbytery.

One evening in the month of February (that is if my memory is correct) my father came home from Kerang and said we would go to church next Sunday, as a minister of our own denomination would be preaching in the Methodist Church in the evening, so we all went in in the farm dray. When the congregation had all assembled, the minister told us that Mr. Clarkson who was then in charge of the Kerang circuit finally gave him the privilege of holding his first service in the Church. The minister was the Rev. Mark Dixon - he had been minister of the Smeaton, Smythedale and Wangaratta Churches previously. He was a scholar and a man possessed with a special pulpit gift. I cannot remember the Old Testament reading nor the psalms that were sung (It was only psalms and paraphrases that were sung in the Presbyterian Church at that time) but

remember it was the 2nd. paraphrase that was sung and the New Testament reading was the first chapter according to the Gospel of John, and the text was from the 10, 11, and 12th verses of that chapter. It was a helpful and inspiring sermon. He was in need of help and I believe he anxiously desired help and had the needed help been given, I am confident he would have built up a strong Church in Kerang and Districts. But alas, that help was not given, and he left this district a disappointed man, resigned from the Church and later joined Survey Party in Queensland and the work of the Presbyterian Church was delayed for 6 years. It has been my experience through life that slips from grace by lay men can have sympathy and mercy extended in abundance, but little to a man trained and set apart as an Ambassador of the Church of Jesus Christ. Mr. Dixon reared a family of 1 daughter and 2 sons and they would do credit to any Christian community in the wide world.

The Presbytery sent a Home Missioner to work in Durham Ox, Macorna and Tragowel Parishes in 1880. He was a native of Kent in England and came out to Adelaide with his young wife in the year 1880. That city was then a town of tents. He was a nephew of Sir John Morphets of that city. He had considerable experience with the Blacks and said that in their native state, the Blacks were really a 'noble race before they became contaminated with the white man. He learned their language and customs and said they had a belief in future rewards and punishments and were chaste in morals especially in their marriage ceremonies. He held services at Durham Ox on one Sunday and then on the following Saturday afternoon, came to our home on the old Dry Lake. He stayed with us over night and held a service at Tragowel at 11 o'clock am. then went and preached at the Union Church as it was then called at 3pm. He was aged 64 years and his method of transport was horse and saddle and to say the real truth, he had a most fatiguing and unpleasant journey from one preaching place to the other as his horse was aged and stiff, and his saddle although new, a most uncomfortable one. As far as I can gather, he did good work until the severe drought of 1881 set in and the settlers were getting their holdings into shipshape; so they had a difficulty in being able to carry through, so the Presbytery transferred Mr. Morphet to Borung and Mysia where the settlers were less severely affected by the dry spell. He was very successful in his work there for in a short time those districts were able to form a charge with a duly ordained Minister inducted

The next effort to obtain a Presbyterian services was made in 1884, when the Rev. John Nicol held his first service in the Mechanics Hall - as it was then called, at 11am, on the 7th. September 1884. He preached again on the following Sunday at the same hour. His subject being "The shepherd leaving the 99 Sheep of his flock and going in search the one that was lost and then he had found it, placed it his shoulder carrying it home rejoicing) and from then until now the Gospel has never ceased to be preached to this congregation by faithful ministers. The Rev. William Grey who was then the Minister at Avoca took up the work here and a Minister, the Rev. Robert Johnston, a native of Lisburn Ireland and a Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland took Mr. Grey's place at Avoca. He was quite a young man, having only completed his college course. He was subsequently called and inducted into a Church in the Gouldburn Valley. Mr. Gray preached for the first time in the Mechanics Hall on 12 Oct. 1884.

Mr. Gray continued the work until early in 1885 when he returned to Avoca, but during about 3 months, he did wonderfully in building up the congregation of Kerang, Tragowel, Macorna, Durham Ox and Pyramid Hill as it was then called. Doing all his transport by horse and saddle: he was a young strong man was used to the saddle. Mr. Andrew Royan loaned him a good pony and saddle, and Mr. Gray knew how to get from the pony without taxing its strength.

Mr. Gray liked the people and the district and that affection did not pass unreciprocated. A call was duly signed and forwarded to the Presbytery of Castlemaine to be presented to Mr. Gray, but unfortunately several happenings occurred which ended in the call not being sustained.

The first was Mrs. Gray meeting with a serious buggy accident, which caused her to be laid up for some time and secondly there, was a mining accident, which caused the death of two members of Mr. Gray's congregation, and finally the Avoca congregation refused to release him. So then, we were put on the supply list causing a vacancy of about 15 months.

A Congregational meeting was held on 7th. January 1886 stating that, the congregation was ready to proceed to a call. On the 19th January 1886, the Rev, Dr. James Nish moderated in a call to the Rev, J. H. Shalberg --- the Rev. J. H. Shalberg was called in March 1886. He preached for the first time in the Mechanics Hall on 3rd. January 1886, his text being from the second Epistle General of Peter Chapt. 3 verse 18. His ordination and induction took place in April at Durham Ox and welcome was given the following evening.

The ladies had raised the sum of 10 pounds to purchase a pulpit gown to be presented to Mr. Shalberg at the welcome but alas the manufacturers had failed to have it completed and delivered according as they promised. However, the Rev. G. M. Connor came to the relief of the ladies and informally presented the garment which was a beautiful one to be given to Mr. Shalberg when it arrived.

During Mr. Shalberg's Ministry, an organ was purchased at a cost of 50 pounds. Previous to that, the Masonic Brethren kindly loaned their organ for the services which were held on each alternate Sunday. The Anglicans at the Union Church paid the Presbyterians for their share in that Church and with the amount they received and the sum raised by subscription, the Tragowel Presbyterians built a new Church about 3 miles north from the Macorna township and about 12 from Kerang. The services at the Tragowel State School and the Union Church were discontinued. The Union Church was situated about 3 miles due east from the Macorna town. Mr. Shalberg opened the Tragowel Church but I have forgotten the date. I have the date of Mr. Shalberg's resignation, but perhaps that could be got from the Presbytery -- I think his time of ministry was about 2 years.

There was a fairly long vacancy between Mr. Shalberg's resignation and Mr. Webster's induction early in march 1889. (Since writing the date of Mr. Webster's induction, I was a bit doubtful about the date and applied to the Secretary of the Inglewood church if there was any record of the date of Mr. Webster's translation from Inglewood to Kerang and this information was received ---- the correct date is the 10th of March 1889.) When Mr. Webster was inducted, he boarded for a while, started the Sunday School and dispensed the Communion from then until the end of his ministry. He always dispensed the Communion by himself alone without any assistance from a Session. And I would like to mention here that the only property that the congregation owned at the beginning of Mr. Webster's Ministry, with including the Government's Grant of land were the organ, and there was a debt of about 100 pounds after the institution of the Sunday School and Communion. He began to stir up the congregation about the building of a Church. The majority of the congregation considered that the site in the northern end on Nolan St. was too far away and it would be better to have a position more central, so the site where the church and Sunday School stands was investigated.

The owner was consulted about it and agreement arrived at for a price for about 10 pounds.

Two members of the Board were appointed to meet the owner on the date fixed, one being a commission agent on the date, and to pay the amount. But owing to some lapse of memory the delegates had failed to keep their appointment and the owner of the allotment in question was one that had not any strong thoughts about church matters, sought to gain a little more money by the failure to keep the agreement. However, terms were arrived at but I am not sure it was at the original sum agreed upon or a few pounds more. Then Mr. Webster bought the adjoining allotments where the Manse and other improvements are placed and rented a Manse from Mrs. Littleton until such time as he could get a manse erected on the land he had purchased, and here comes in the wisdom of our Church in making the release of the money received for the allotments sold.

Quite a number of the people complained about the conditions and demanded that the money be released and be paid over to the congregation forthwith. But those in charge of the money said no, you must raise pound for pound or else it will not be released. So those complainers had to give way and an agreement arrived at. Mr. Evander Mc. Ivor, the architect, drew the plans. I think the selected came to about 800 pounds and the other, which was cheaper, rejected. Tenders were called and accepted and the work was begun by a young architect, Mr. James Jorgenson - Mr. Mc. Ivor recommended a Mr. Cowper to superintend the work and he, Mr Webster and Mr. Walker, treasurer at the time, and Manager of the Bank of Victoria. Mr Cowper saw that the work was carried out and according to plans, Mr. Weber also keeping an eye to the erection and Mr. Walker was careful that no progress payment was made unless work to the full value was done. These three men mentioned, along with the architect who drew the plans and specifications, and those who stood firm to the condition on which the moneys for the sale of the land were to be released to them, the credit should be given for the beautiful church we have had erected. The building was completed and all tools and accessories used in the work of construction removed, and was opened by Mr. Webster himself on Sunday the 24th July 1892. I cannot tell you the date the Manse was built, but I remember the architect, Mr. Marquand, who superintended the building of the London Chartered Bank of Australia was the man who drew the plans of the manse and

Superintended its erection, both buildings were going on at the same time. Mr. Webster bought the land, erected the Manse and stable and buggy shed, prepared and planted a beautiful orchard and enclosed the allotment.

The total cost amounting to 737 pounds and his remuneration for stipend and rent of manse from the Kerang congregation was 80 pounds a year. This congregation must consider we were well treated. For comparison, take Mr. Shalberg's term, when the Kerang's share stipend was 80 pounds a year and Mr. Garden was paid 60 pounds for that house, where the Bence brothers now live in, making a total of 140 pounds.

Mr. Webster also provided his own transport in the form of a pair of ponies, buggy and harness; their Fodder also.

Mr. David Hawthorne then gave an offer for 100 pounds for the site on the northern end of Nolan St., as he was thinking about building a residence. His offer was accepted and he built his home there. When the transfer of that allotment was being effected. There was trouble about finding of the deeds. They could not be traced and were not in the bank. Mr. Webster asked if Mr. A. Amos was any relation to the men of that name who were Railway contractors and was told that he was. So he wrote to Mr. Amos and got an immediate reply. As Mr. Amos had put the deeds in with his own papers and had forgotten them when leaving Kerang. At that time, he was living in Central Queensland. I want to make a statement here with regard to the sale of those allotments.

Rumours get about and no-one knows how or where they start. I heard them long ago and not long since that Mr. David Hawthorne bought those allotments at a price, which was disadvantageous to the church. And I here state that it is utterly incorrect. As at that time, no one ever thought that Kerang would ever be a town of any size and even when the Kerang to Swan Hill railway was in construction, lots of persons were predicting as soon as the line was completed to Swan Hill, the town of Kerang would begin to wane. There was very little attention paid to town allotments and I say that David Hawthorne paid their full value at the time. He was a member of the Board of management from 1884 until he was called to his higher home in November 1897 and I have always found him an honourable and just man.

At the first meeting of the Board after his translation, passed a tribute to his memory and it is entered in Mr. Webster's own handwriting. My reason for recording this statement is to have the onus removed from the name of a man to whom it could never

have been applied

Mr. Webster said when he came to Kerang, he would try and see that wherever the Presbyterian people were asking for a service, if possible he would have it taken to them. He began monthly services at at Cohuna and services at Lake Meran, Wandella, now Dingwall, Sand Hill Lake, Quambatook and Towanninie – you can see what a large charge this was. It extended from Capel's Crossing in the north to near Jarklin in the south and from Cohuna in the east to Quambatook and Towanninie in the west. A distance of fully 50 miles from north to south, and about the same distance east to west or a radius of 25 miles, and that was carried out with the assistance of the Home missionary.

The first missionary to Quambatook was Mr. Scott Morton. Afterwards he became an ordained Minister and is now on the retired list. Subsequently, Quambatook and the adjoining preaching was formed into a full charge.

Mr. Moscript went there as an exit-student and was called, ordained and inducted as the first Minister of that charge. Mr. Webster was feeling the strain rather too much for his strength and found it imperative that he would have to seek another charge where the strain would be less severe. He was called to Oakleigh – the call was sustained and he left Kerang on the 1st of November 1900, giving this congregation a faithful and unselfish service for 11 years and 7 months. The text from which he preached his first sermon was Revelation 20th Chapter and verse 12. *"And another book was opened which is the book of life."* The text of his farewell sermon was from ----- *"Render and account of thy steward-ship for thou mayest be no longer steward."*

On one occasion during the flood time in 1889, he went on his way to take the service at Tragowel and the Nine Mile Creek was in flood. So he undressed at the creek and holding his clothing high above his head, he waded the creek, dressing after reaching the bank and proceeding on foot to the church, held the service and went through the same performance on his way back to his father's home. This was not one of the pleasantest undertakings in the month of July.

During his ministry, the Kerang Church was built and paid for, the Sunday School started and the Communion instituted and he sold the Manse with land, stables and orchard, and the adjoining allotments for the sum of 600 pounds. The guarantors were Mr. Donald McDonald, J.R. Rundle, David Grant Rattray, Andrew Coady, James Thompson and Hugh Thompson. They were also appointed trustees of the above property.

The Rev. Seivers of Eaglehawk on the following Sunday declared the Church vacant. After a vacancy of nearly 10 months, the Re. Charles James Legate was called and inducted on the 28th of August 1901. He was a native of the town of Newry in Northern Ireland and was trained and ordained by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He was descended from a long line of ministers. He came out to Queensland and was minister of several congregations in that State and was moderator of the Assembly for that State for one term.

When he began work in this charge he took the necessary steps to have Elders elected and the following nominated and elected to the office of Elders. They were Mr. Andrew Royan for the Durham Ox congregation, Mr. John Mckay for Pyramid Hill, David Wishart for Tragowel, and Alexander Duncan Frazer, George Mc Coll Hawthorne and James Thompson for the Kerang congregation. The ordination and induction took place in the Kerang church on the 6th of November 1901 and a paragraph appeared in the Messenger of November 1901 mentioning the formation of the first Session for the charge. During 1902, the Presbytery considered the charge too large and took steps for the division of the charge. The northern and comprised Kerang, Tragowel and Wandella afterwards became Dingwell, and Mr. Legate was to continue as Minister of this charge. Boort was annexed to Durham Ox and Pyramid, forming the new charge in the south and Mr. James Legate was called and inducted into the new charge being the first Minister. Previous to that, a meeting was called for the 6th June where approval of the Kerang congregation was given for the decision of the Presbytery.

I believe the date of Mr. Legate's induction will be found in the minute book. I omitted to state that during Mr. Legate's Ministry, the manse was paid for and on the suggestion of Mr. Alexander Duncan Frazer; the Kerang Church called St. Andrews. The footpaths were asphalted and wire doors and windows placed on the Manse. Mr. Legate gave us a faithful service for about 6 years. I cannot remember the date of his resignation, he was translated to Tatura.

After a vacancy of a number of months, I can't now say how many; Mr. Farquhar Chisolm -an exit student - was ordained before coming here and was inducted to the Kerang charge on the 6th of May 1908. This being his first charge, he gave us a good service of 2 years and 4 months, leaving Kerang on the 12th September 1910. Mr. Andrew S. Muir Snr. Drove Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm to their field of work at Wangaratta.

The Rev. Drummond of Swan Hill declared the Kerang Church vacant on September 25th 1910. After a vacancy of 4 months, the Rev. G. R. Jones was inducted on 24th January 1911 and he preached his first sermon from the First Epistle General of Peter, Chapter 1, 25th verse ----*“But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever and this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached to you.”* --- This sermon was preached on the 29th of June. He gave the congregation a faithful service for 13 years when he was compelled through ill-health to relinquish his charge in 1925. During his Ministry, the School hall was built and paid for, the record of which you will find in the minute book. The tennis courts were also erected at this time. The last sermon preached by Mr. Jones in Kerang was for the Anglican Minister, the Rev. Bamford who had suffered a severe bereavement in the passing of his son, a bright little boy. His text being 2nd Timothy, chapter 4, verses 7 and 8. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day and not to me only, but all them also that love his appearing.”*

After a vacancy of a few months, the Rev Dr. Uren was inducted on the 1st October 1925. He gave the congregation a wonderful service. From his first sermon to his last, they were of a wonderful uniformity, and he had many friends and admirers. He gave a service that will long be remembered. He resigned and sailed for Scotland at the Easter vacation 1927. After arriving in Scotland, he was appointed as Assistant Minister to the Dunblane Cathedral and while there, a deputation from St. Andrew and St. Paul, the second largest Presbyterian Church in Canada, called him and he consented to stay with them for a term of 5 years, which he did and then returned to Scotland. He was appointed assistant Minister at the McDonald Road Church, Edinburgh, and was still holding that position in 1939. On last Sunday 18th February 1945, I had a letter from a friend enclosing a cutting of the Argus of the 12th February 1945 of his passing to his Highest Home on the 9th February. What a transformation; to be taken away from the roar and turmoil and scenes of war and placed in the peace and joy of his heavenly Father’s Home.

The Rev. Dr. A.E. Uren was inducted to the Kerang Church on 1st October 1925.

A farewell was given to Mr. and Mrs. Uren on the 22nd

March 1927.

After a short vacancy, Mr. Fiddian was inducted on the 2nd June 1927 and gave readily a faithful service of 13 years and 4 months. He worked hard for this congregation and also for the whole Church of Australia, working long hours all through the meetings of Assembly and attending on the different Committees to which he was appointed throughout the year.

If he had never spoken a word from the pulpit of St. Andrew's or any other pulpit in Kerang, his life during those nearly 14 years was one Gospel sermon, and he had a heart large enough to enfold that larger Church which Dr. Keller of Geneva called the Growing Church which had no frontiers and knew no boundary lines.

His resignation took effect on the 31st March 1941.

After a vacancy of 4 months, the Rev. G. T. Renfrey was inducted on the 2nd of August 1941 and resigned after 2 years having given an exceptionally good service. He gave us a good help in getting the debt paid off, which had been standing for a number of years and left us with a good credit balance.

During the past sixty years, we have had 8 Ministers in this charge and they have all given us a wonderful service. The Rev. G. R. Jones who passed his 87 years on the 23rd July last, the Rev. Farquhar Chisolm and the Rev. G. T. Renfrey are the only ones in life. The others having been Translated to the Home of Their heavenly Father.

This is only a crude and badly written record from memory with many omissions, mistakes and corrections by one who has been more accustomed to the crowbar and the plough than the finer arts of the pen and literature. But if it is a help in a small measure to those who will write the history of the life and work of the Presbyterian Church in the district, it will have achieved the purpose for which it is written.

Yours Truly,

James Thompson

22nd February 1945