Christ Church Cooma

The Monaro's oldest church, Christ Church on Church Road, Cooma, has the distinction of being the oldest on the Monaro and is classified by the National Trust of Australia as a building of interest and architectural



merit.

Christ Church Cemetery, Cooma, is the final resting place for many Monaro pioneers.

It was only in June 1823, at Billilingra, that Europeans first, formally, sighted this Monaro area. (Captain John Currie, Brigade Major John Ovens, Joseph Wild and at least one aboriginal.)

It lay outside the Limits of Location set by NSW Governor Darling beyond which the acquisition and occupation of land were prohibited.

Those who settled here did so in defiance of the government and became known as squatters.

Victoria did not become a separate state until 1851 so that, in 1845, it was still part of NSW and the Monaro area was regarded as taking in county extending from Michelago well into what became Victoria.

Not surprisingly, it took years for people to settle here in significant numbers and for decades there was no town of Cooma – rather, there existed a "locality".

A burial ground developed on land along the road that led to Myalla. It is believed that there are several graves here for which there are no records or markers.

Of graves that are recorded, the oldest is that of Johanna O'Rourke, from Tipperary in Ireland, who died aged 21 in 1842.

Another of the early graves is that of Murray Mitchell, the son of the explorer and surveyor Sir Thomas Mitchell, who died aged 18 in 1846.

In 1843, the Reverend Edward Gifford Pryce was appointed by the Church of England as Missionary Chaplain to Monaro and the South Coast. He was the last of the Missionary Chaplains to be sent from England to Australia by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,

and after months of homelessness, he took up residence at The Grange, a house near the burial ground.

This house remains. At that time, there was no church on the Monaro.

Early in 1845, Bishop William Grant Broughton (the first and only Church of England bishop of Australia) visited this area and while here, after consultation with Pryce, John Lambie (Commissioner for Crown Lands) and Government Surveyor McCabe, decided to build the Christ Church on land adjoining the burial ground, belonging to William Bradley.

Bishop Broughton also designed it, while staying at the Kirwan Inn, Cooma and on 17 February that year, he laid the foundation stone.

But financial and labouring problems beset the project and the building was not completed until 1850.

The site of the church was absorbed into what became a cemetery.

The cemetery, following Crown Land subdivisions, was broken up into sections along denominational lines – Roman Catholic, Church of England, Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Quaker, Jewish and "other denominations" in accordance with the practice of the time.

Early in the 20th century, the Church of England bought from the Crown that section of the cemetery on which the church stood.

From 1845-1850, the town of Cooma developed quickly and even by the time the construction of Christ Church was completed, it had become apparent that it had been built in the wrong place and was too small.

Services took place at Christ Church from January 1850 until 1872 when a new church, St Paul's, in town was completed.

Since then, it has been used for Church of England services infrequently – some years not at all.

There have been a few periods when the church was used for services by other Christian groups. It has also been used for special services, most recently in 2011, for descendants of the early settlers of this district buried in the cemetery, and from time to time is visited by groups of people during historic church/building tours.

Following the development of the present cemetery off Mittagang Road in Cooma (~1876), the old one was closed to further burials except for a few people who had a close ancestor who was a worshipper at the church during the 22 years that it was the sole Church of England church in the district.

Records show that 243 people are buried in the cemetery, with all but 50 to 60 having died in the 1800s.

With the ravages of time and weather, the church has periodically fallen into disrepair and it underwent renovations in 1936, 1960 and 2001.

The building now stands as a memorial to the early settlers and pioneers of the area, and to Bishop Broughton.

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Monaro Early Pioneers, Squatters and Land "Owners"

1826 "Limits of Location"

Order issued by Governor Darling. Land not be be sold or let beyond the limits. Occupation was prohibited. Area extended south to Michelago in 1830.

Richard Brooks 1827
Aged 16, he took cattle to "Gejizrick" (Berridale) in 1827.

Henry and Charles York and John Cosgrove 1829-1830
Had stock at Billilingera, north of Cooma.

John Pendergast 1829
Had Moonbah. Was in Omeo in 1823, so could have been earlier.

Joshua John Moore 1830
Had Yangalara run, south of Michelago.

Dr David Reid 1830
Had Pindjera (Bunyan). Building in Bunyan 1834.

Cooper & Levy 1832
Had a hut at "Kuma" (Cooma).

Joseph Ward and Samuel Bowler 1832
Had Wambrook, near Cooma.

Timothy Beard & Joseph Rolfe 1832-33
Had stock at Eienmondgy (Ironmungy) in 1832.

James (William) Kiss 1832
Had land at Nimmitabel.

George Barrett 1835
Had Bolairo (near Adaminaby).

1836 Squatting Act

Annual fee of ten pounds. In 1837 John Lambie, Commissioner for Monaro, started collecting fees. Finished a census in 1839.

James Kirwan 1836

Commenced a business in Cooma in 1836. Took over the lease of the Cooma (Kuma) run, 30,000 acres. He was killed in 1852, being shot by his groom/gardener, John McSpadden, whilst being the inn keeper at Kirwan's Inn.

1840 Stuart Ryrie was employed to conduct the first official survey of Squatting Districts on Monaro. In 1848 the runs were published in the Government Gazette.

John Lambie 1842

Was the first public official on Monaro and the first Magistrate. In 1848 he acquired a run of 1,280 acres in Cooma.

William Bradley 1842

Held a number of properties on Monaro - over 120,000 hectares by 1848 - Myalla, Cooma, Dangelong, Rock Flat, Coolrington, Maffra, and Bibbenluke. Most leases given in in 1866.

James Hain 1852

Shepherd at Rock Flat for two years then established The Lord Raglan Hotel in Lambie St, Cooma.

1861 Crown Lands Act (The Robertson Land Acts).

Provided for the legal purchase and occupation of Crown lands. Squatters given 1/25th of their stations via lease and license. Remainder available to others. William Bradley grew his holdings to 300,000 acres.

He sold some, and after his death in 1868, his estate sold most of his properties to other parties.

From the late 1880s there were big droughts on Monaro - *Federation Drought 1895-1903.* Many properties changed hands during this period.