



ST. ANDREW'S AXEDALE

1868-1968

AXEDALE — 1868-1968



The Rev. James Nish when
35 years of age.

Although Presbyterians held religious services prior to 1854 it, was not till that year that Dr. Nish arrived in Bendigo.

It is known that Dr. Nish preached to the shepherds in Axedale, long before the church was built, but where is not known.

An account in "Early Annals of Bendigo 1852-1860" gives the story of Dr. Nish being rowed across the flooded Campaspe River at Axedale in a bark canoe by two native women in 1858.

The foundation stone was laid on September 30, 1868, and the church was opened on April 18, 1869, by Dr. Nish. It was built by David Mill, a stone mason of Axedale and the grandfather of our James Mill. It was built with bluestone, quarried and donated by Napthalie Ingham. "It is a neat, substantial, stone and brick church. It is roofed with corrugated iron; the roof being lined and painted inside with light blue.

The inner walls are rough plastered.

It has stained glass windows, and a circular window over the pulpit. The seats are of varnished Kauri pine with ends of cedar with a base of pine.

At the beginning this church was connected with the Charge of Heathcote. But early records tell us that "the amount raised and received from Axedale was not commensurate with the services rendered," and it was decided "to get rid of Axedale." Application was made to Castlemaine Presbytery to secure the charge from Heathcote to Huntly. The church at Axedale, though in connection with the Heathcote church, was built without help from that congregation. The estimate cost of its erection and fittings was £305-8-0, and there remained a debt of £34.

The church accommodates 115 worshippers conveniently, and Divine Worship was held regularly at fortnightly intervals.

(12 services held by Rev. D. Renton yielded £13-11-0 as collection).



David Mill, the builder of the Axedale Church, and his wife.

At some time before 1888, a student preacher named Darling rode horseback from Barnadown to Axedale. He had never before mounted a horse, and young ladies in the home to which he returned for Sunday night's tea were heard to remark that the "poor Darling must eat his tea from the mantel piece." It was about this time that a horse, harness and buggy were purchased for the Minister's use. Axedale contributed £2.

In 1900 or so, the Home Mission charge of Goornong, Barnadown and Axedale was formed. Rev. Taylor was in this parish in 1900. He was a well-loved, elderly clergyman, who always wore full clerical dress when visiting his flock. He had a very fresh complexion and a long, flowing, white beard. A story is told that one cold, wet night, a messenger called with news of an unexpected death in a lonely home some miles from the Manse. Some hours later, this tall, saintly figure was knocking at the door of the lonely hut. His buggy was drawn up not far from the door, his tired horse contentedly consuming the chaff in the nose bag which was always carried on these journeys. Suddenly two frightened faces appeared in the

partly opened doorway. Mr. Taylor greeted them with what he hoped would be a comforting message from Holy Scripture — "Yes, My Lord," stammered the frightened voice. Then as the second figure caught a glimpse of the long white beard, flowing from a face that was silhouetted against the faint red light from the buggy lamp, he gave a frightened gasp. Mr. Taylor had removed his hat, and the light cast a little halo behind his white hair. "Brother," came the frightened voice, "I believe it is The Lord Himself!"

Among the early Home Missioners were Messrs. Mills, Thompson and C. R. Andrews, who left in 1916 and went to England, where he was a munition worker during the First World War. Others were Messrs. Cox, Ray, Hamilton, Moyle, Heary, Moscript, Finley, Ivory, Mathers, Anderson, Coon and Fortune — though not in that order. Several elderly men were appointed, but they found the 16 mile journey from Goornong too far.

By 1929 the Home Mission Station closed; the congregation had dwindled and Axedale was closed for a time.

It was at the instigation of the late Mr. Cochrane that services were re-commenced about 1931-32, the Minister of St. John's church taking monthly services, and his travelling expenses initially paid, it is believed, by Mr. Cochrane.

Later, St. Andrew's Minister shared in the services alternately with St. John's Minister, and when the Minister used his own car, the collection covered expenses.

In 1943, an attempt was again made "to get rid of Axedale" and connect it with Heathcote. This failed, as did all other attempts, and Axedale continues to be the responsibility of St. Andrews.



Rev. John Aitken, B.A., B.D.

In 1947, Rev. John Aitken "inherited" from the late Rev. MacLean the full responsibility for all services. At this time Axedale was out on its own, with no discernible connection with the Presbyterian Church as a whole, and had neither interest nor part in the Presbyterian family. In order to take some part in Presbyterian affairs, the congregation was induced to contribute annually to the Babies' Home and £52 each year to the funds of St. Andrew's. Later, the Presbytery authorised the inclusion of Axedale within the Parish of St. Andrew's. As both parties were agreeable, the Axedale congregation has functioned very happily as part of St. Andrew's.

Since the congregation was under the jurisdiction of St. Andrew's Session and Board, it was given representation on the Session by Mr. Ian Paton, who was elected and ordained as an Elder in 1962. He is a grandson of the late James Paton, who was a committee member when the church was built.

St. Andrew's Board took the full responsibility for the care and oversight of the finance and maintenance of church buildings and grounds.

Axedale shares whole-heartedly in the system of pledged giving, begun in 1957; shares in St. Andrew's Red Cross work and assists in all St. Andrew's activities.

Since 1948, many improvements have been effected in the church. The old pulpit has been replaced by a new pulpit and dais, and the church has been carpeted. The cost was met by a series of concerts held in the Axedale Shire Hall. The Communion table was donated by the Taylor family in memory of their parents. The Communion chairs were donated by the Mill family in memory of their parents. Communion glasses and plate were donated by the Haynes family in memory of their parents. Brass vases were donated by the Hodge family in memory of their parents. The Hymn Board was made and donated by David Davies of St. Andrew's. These new furnishings were dedicated at a special service by the late Rev. C. R. Andrews.

The formation of a Ladies' Guild, 8 years ago, has stimulated greater interest in the property, and has been instrumental in having provided

such amenities as Christening font, electric lighting and power, the connecting of the church with the water main, the re-painting of the interior of the church, the building of a porch in 1962 with bluestone supplied by John Randell from the old Kimbolton homestead, the erection of a new front fence, a new cupboard and new guttering. Further improvements will be carried out as time goes on.

Each year a Harvest Festival service is held, and the produce is donated to the Home for the Blind.

Axedale is indeed grateful to St. Andrew's choir for assisting at special services — i.e. Christmas, Harvest Festival, Anniversary, etc.

Our Presbyterian children share a Sunday School with the Anglican children and some of the teachers are Presbyterian.

St. Andrew's and Axedale are now under the guidance of the Rev. Nevin Vawser.

The little poem "The Bluestone Church," though not written expressly for Axedale, is most applicable —

THE BLUESTONE CHURCH

(Newham Presbyterian Church, 1868-1968 — by G. Walters)

One hundred years,
It's such a long, long time ago.
The pioneers who toiled so hard
Did not build a church of show.
A place to worship, humble, yes, and strong,
And it has sought the test of time
For all to come along.

One hundred years,
It's nestled in this sacred place
In all serenity —
The quiet, peaceful, lovely spot
Where God must surely be.

One hundred years,
So many feet have crossed the well worn step
To worship, pray and sing,
And listen to the word of God
Their minister did bring.

One hundred years,
Yes, it's such a long, long time ago;
We now thank God for those pioneers
Who are resting up above,
Their work well done, the Little Bluestone Church
A symbol of their labor and their love.

(Historical notes compiled by Mrs. L. McNutt)

A Centenary Service, conducted by the Rev. John Aitken, B.A., B.D., will be held at Axedale at 2 p.m. on September 15, 1968.