

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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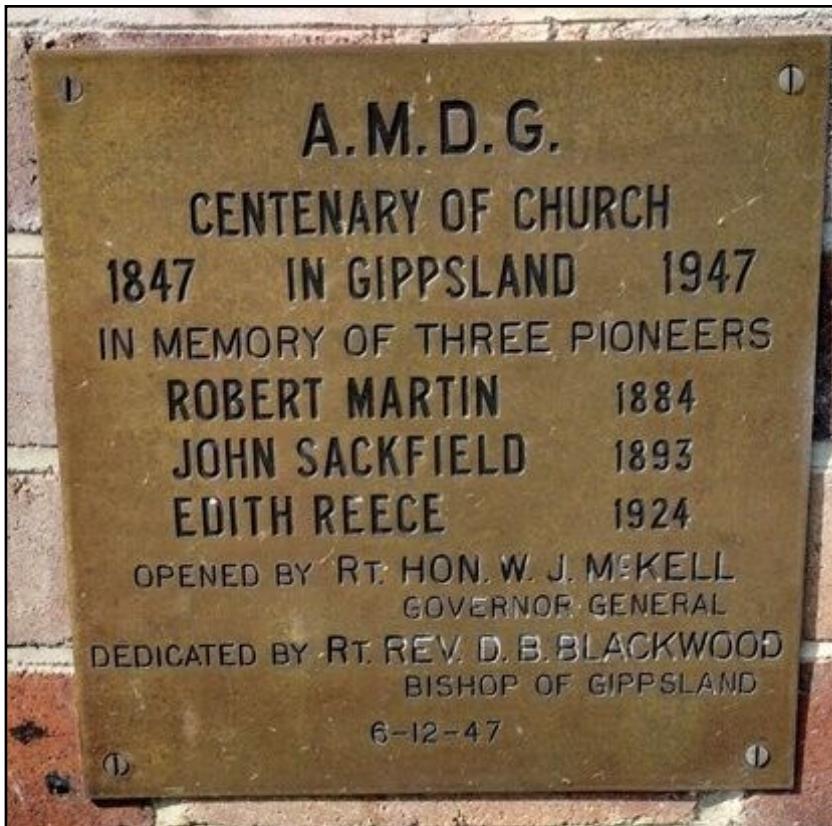


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NEWSLETTER 182 - May 2025

Lych-gate Memorial, Cann River

REMOTE MINISTERING IN EAST GIPPSLAND - Carrol Preston

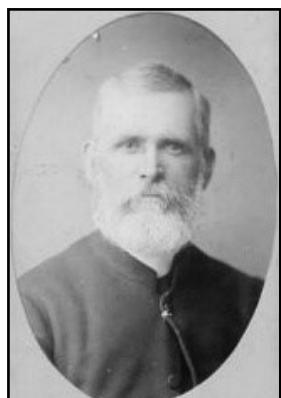


CANN RIVER MEMORIAL

This Lych Gate, built in 1947, commemorates the work of three pioneer evangelists of the Church of England in East Gippsland: Robert Martin, John Sackfield and Edith Reece.

The small wooden church behind the Gate was built in 1928 with funds donated by Edith Reece, an English woman who came to Cann River as deaconess in 1922, and left in 1932.

The unveiling of the Lych Gate and memorial plaque, by the Governor-General, Right Hon. Sir W. J. McKell, took place on 6 December 1947. This was also the date of the centenary of the Church of England in Gippsland. The memorial was dedicated by the Bishop of Gippsland, Right Rev. D.B. Blackwood.



REV. ROBERT JOHNSTON MARTIN

MARTIN

Born: 1832 in Ireland

Died: 1924 in Bairnsdale, Victoria

The **REV. ROBERT MARTIN** was known as the 'Apostle of East Gippsland' and the first Anglican minister at Orbost. He stayed first with James Cameron and held services in Lochiel Barn, alternating with Bendoc and Buchan. When Mr. Martin was absent, a local settler, Mr. Watt read the service which was held at the Orbost Station Homestead property of Sir W. G. Clarke.

Mr. Robert Martin was appointed by Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne to be Stipendiary Reader in charge of the district in 1885. He stayed in Orbost until 1890 when he moved to Paynesville.

Lost in the wilderness of East Gippsland

July 1892 — Mr John Sackville

REPORTS ON THE TRAGEDY

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): 2 July 1892

Considerable interest is being taken here during the past few days as to Mr. Sackfield's whereabouts.

On Tuesday last, after partaking of the mid-day meal at Mrs. Downey's, mounted his horse en route for the Errinundra country, with the view of selecting a block.

Nothing has been heard of him since, those knowing him feel rather anxious as to his safety, and are hopeful he will find Mr. Reid's (*sic*) or Orbost before experiencing any further hardships.

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): 9 July 1892

No tidings have yet come to hand of the missing man, Sackfield, who was last seen at Clarkeville on 4th June. Enquiries have been made at all the settlements in the neighbourhood but no-one appears to have seen or heard of him. Senr. Constable Clark is endeavouring to arrange for a search party but there is very little, if any probability of the unfortunate man being found alive.

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): July 1892

Up to the present, we have no tidings as to the whereabouts of Mr. Sackfield. Messrs. Johns and Beecroft, constables at Bendoc, in company with others, have failed in their search to find the unfortunate man. Some reports have it, he seems to have reached a certain prospecting camp on the Combienbar track, and it appears that shortly afterwards, his tracks are not visible. It yet remains possible that he may be heard of at Marlo or Genoa.

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): 23 July 1892

Const. Johns and James Rozynski, a good bushman, have been absent all this week in search for the unfortunate man, Mr. Sackfield, who has not been heard of since 22 June; the searchers left for Buldah and will travel south from there. Strange to say, nothing has been heard of the horse and it is generally supposed, that it being warmer at Combienbar, the animal has not made it back, but it seems almost hopeless that other than the remains of the lost man will be recovered, the native dogs being numerous between here and the coast in either direction.

Gippsland Farmer's Journal: 26 July 1892

I was sorry to see a paragraph in a Melbourne paper the other day, about our old friend, Sackfield, who acted as Church of England reader here for some time, and was familiar to us all. After he left Calligee, he went to Geelong, and was thence transferred to Bendoc, where he has got lost in the bush and it is feared, has perished. The paragraph I allude to says:—"Mr. Sackfield, a middle aged man, who recently retired from the appointment of lay reader in this district, while searching for suitable agricultural land to select, unfortunately lost his way, and although he has been absent over a fortnight, nothing has been heard of his whereabouts or remains. A search party, including the Bendoc constable, went out, but their efforts were futile, and it is very doubtful if he ever will be found alive."

Over a year later, the skeleton of his horse, and a weather-rotted saddle were discovered, but no trace of the body of John Sackfield was found.

Despite being well read and educated **MR. SACKFIELD** found the going tough. In the winter of 1887 he became disorientated and was lost for several hours in the area south of Calligee. Obviously the position of lay

reader was either voluntary or provided him with a very small income and John's life was not an easy one. There was no manse or parsonage for Mr. Sackfield. Instead he found alternative accommodation in the form of a large hollow log about halfway along the track between Calligee and Traralgon South. He lived like this for 3 years until 1890 when he was offered the position of lay reader in the Geelong area under the leadership of Cannon Goodman. Within months this position terminated and Mr. Sackfield was on the road again, this time as the reader in the remote Bendoc area. oddbhistory.com.au



August 1892

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): 27 August 1892

The Delegate correspondent of the *Bombala Herald* writes on 8th Aug.:— "Yesterday it was reported in town that Mr. Sackfield, the missing man, has been heard of. It is said he has written to a friend at Clarkeville, and that he is safe and well. I have not been able to get particulars. Some short time ago, it was rumoured that Mr. Sackfield's horse and saddle were found somewhere near Buldah,

Snowy River Mail (Orbost)

Travellers on the Bendoc road have been shown a hollow tree in which the Rev. R. Martin was constrained to take up his abode for two or three days on account of having lost his track, when first visiting the border goldfields. The tree in question, which has been appropriately named the parsonage, has recently fallen down but still remains an object of interest on the route.

A contemporary referring to the recent disappearance of Mr. Sackfield, a lay reader who succeeded **MR. MARTIN** in the charge of the Bendoc district, says:—"Every traveller on the Calligee road has noticed the large hollow log in which Mr. Sackfield, who was a lay reader for the district, used to live, and his many friends here will be sorry to read the following concerning him etc. etc." but it seems there was no truth in it, and it is hoped the present report will prove a truthful one."

October 1893

Snowy River Mail (Orbost): 25 October 1893

Last evening we received information that the remains of the horse and saddle belonging to Mr. Sackfield, who, it will be remembered, was lost from near Bendoc in June, 1892, were found. There are no further particulars to hand, but it is probable that a search in the same locality will result in the discovery of the remains of the unfortunate man.

BENDOC NEWS

Oct. 19

It will be in the recollection of most of your readers that about June 1892, a Church of England lay reader named Sackfield was lost in the bush at Combienbar, between here and the coast. A search party was organised and after scouring the country in all directions, returned without succeeding in finding any trace of the missing man.

A saddle bag, for identification, showing signs of having been exposed to the weather for a considerable time, together with a letter, having been received here from Mr. Hensleigh, J.P., of Lower Bendoc, intimating that recently whilst cattle mustering at Combienbar, he discovered the skeleton of a horse, and the remains of a saddle, bridle, breast-plate, and saddle-bags, but being alone in charge of cattle was unable to make an extended search.

A party is being formed to proceed to this portion of the country to prosecute a further search, when it is hoped that the mystery of the unfortunate gentleman's disappearance will be finally solved.

Snowy River Mail (Orbost)

December 1893

A correspondent from Bendoc informs us that a search party organised by Constable Johns, and accompanied by Mr. Hensleigh, who recently discovered the remains of a horse, saddle, and bridle, which were subsequently identified as having belonged to the Rev. Mr. Sackfield, who was lost in the bush at Combienbar in June of last year, has returned after an unsuccessful search extended over several days. No further traces of the unfortunate gentleman were met with.

Snowy River Mail (Orbost)

EAST GIPPSLAND SHRINE TO ANGLICAN LAYMAN, 1947

The Church of England diocese of Gippsland will play a most picturesque part this year in the centenary celebrations of the Church in this State. It is planned to perpetuate the memory of an esteemed lay reader who perished in 1895 (sic) in the snow-covered ranges of Eastern Victoria.

An Englishman, his name was **JOHN SACKFIELD**. Legendary accounts have been handed on by pioneering residents of how, in the course of his pastoral duties, the man was crossing the ranges from Bendoc to a place called Combienbar, when he became lost. Many years afterwards, the skeleton of his horse and weather-rotted saddle were discovered by an Indian hawker (sic), but no trace to this day has been found of the body of John Sackfield.

So highly was he regarded as a Christian worker by residents then, that it has now been considered appropriate to erect a memorial either in Bendoc or on the wild range above Lock-up Creek, where he supposedly died. The memorial will take the form of a cairn such as those which mark the journeys of Count Strzelecki.

It is hoped that a pilgrimage to the shrine of John Sackfield will become a regular event in future years.

Age (Melbourne): February 1947

November 1893

THE LATE MR. SACKFIELD

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SNOWY RIVER MAIL.

Sir, - I have to report that, while collecting cattle at Cobyingbah, on the 14th of this month, I found the remains of a horse, saddle, bridle, breast-plate, and two large sized saddle pockets, which, in my opinion, belonging to the late Mr. Sackfield, who was lost from Bendoc in the month of June, 1892, and was never since heard of, though search parties at the time, I believe, traced the horse to within a few miles of where I found the remains. The horse had evidently been tied to a small sapling and, I believe, died tied up, as there was good grass where I found the remains, and water close to hand.

I, then, made a further search to see if I could find the remains of the unfortunate man, but could not. Having a large mob of cattle on hand and being alone and six miles away from my men, I could not continue the search as far as I wished to.

One of the saddle pockets I brought home with me and sent it to the police constable stationed at Bendoc, in order that some of the residents there could identify it as belonging to the late Mr. Sackfield.

I am willing to make a further search and to show the police the spot where I found the remains of the horse. — Yours etc.,

JOHN A. HENSLEIGH, Bendoc, 29th Oct., 1893



A hollow log similar to one used by John Sackfield.

State Library of Victoria

SISTER EDITH MYVANWY REECE

In 1920, attention was paid to the district around Croajingolong, in the eastern part of Victoria, which had at that time only isolated settlement in rough timber country, of towering hills and gorges.

At the time, there was no Anglican Church of any kind, and services were held in private houses, huts and in the open. The tracks were impossible for ordinary traffic, and often swag and surplice were associated in long tramping journeys.

SISTER EDITH REECE, an Englishwoman, was the first woman to go there. In 1925, she held services in huts, in kitchens, halls, and road camps, visited and helped in many homes, taught Sunday School, and built up a solid church life.



Edith Myvanwy Reece
(1873–1943)

Miss Reece, a cultural English woman, founded the Cann River Mission several years ago and worked alone. She eventually lived in a little hut, and rode on horseback and on a push-bicycle over hill and dale to carry the religion of the Church of England to out-of-the-way men and women and their families.



Sydney J. Kirkby (left) and **Miss Edith Reece** (centre) outside her tent home, in Cann River, in 1925.

Unknown other person

SYDNEY JAMES KIRKBY who, in 1921, travelled by foot from Nimmitabel to Cann River; then by combination of coach, horseback and foot, to Genoa, Mallacoota (which he described as a "place of

exceptional beauty, what a wonderful holiday resort it would make"), and then to Sale via Tonghi, Noorinbee, Combienbar, Club Terrace and Orbost—a journey of 19 days—taking church services in people's houses along the way.



Bishop Sydney James
KIRKBY
(1879–1935)

FAREWELL TO MISS E.M. REECE At Cann River

Residents gathered from near and far to the Noorinbee Hall on Tuesday night last, the occasion being to bid farewell to an esteemed resident in the person of Miss Reece.

The Rev. F. Jones occupied the chair and in an eloquent speech outlined Miss Reece's sojourn in the Cann River district. Leaving the Old Country in company with Sister Agnes on Bishop Cranswick's appeal in 1925, said Rev. Jones. Miss Reece came to a strange land and to an outlying district in Croajingolong, and by the unselfish way in which she carried out her duties in the church work she very quickly endeared herself to the people.

The district throughout which Miss Reece worked was a large one, and it was a monthly visit to all parts, entailing long rides on horseback, even up to forty miles in one day. Residents appreciated to the fullest extent the gift of Miss Reece in the Cann River district in the beautiful St. John's Church which stands on the side of the Princes Highway at Cann River. Visitors had said that it was one of the prettiest interiors of any church outside the cities.

Miss Reece takes her departure for England in May next, and in the few remaining months hopes to visit other parts of Australia.

Extracts from article Bairnsdale Advertiser: 31 December 1929

An active church worker, Miss ~~Edith~~ Myvanwy ~~Reece~~ passed away last week. She was born in 1873 in Birmingham, being the daughter of the late Mr. William H. ~~Reece~~, a well-known solicitor, and Mrs. ~~Reece~~. In 1924 she travelled to Australia as a missionary, under the Bush Church Aid Society, and as a deaconess of Conn River, East Gippsland, she founded and erected a church in memory of her mother. She returned to England in 1931 and settled in Lewes, being associated with St. John's Church and taking office as superintendent of the Sunday school. She was also a supporter of the Christian Alliance of Women and Girls.

Sussex Express (England): 4 June 1943

- Carroll Preston, May 2025