

## IMAGES OF YALLOURN

### SISTER CATHERINE EVA BENNETT (1888-1968)

1923



Title of photograph: '1923-Sister Catherine and her shack. West Camp'

A brief note written by Gippsland historian, Linda Barraclough regarding this photograph stated: "Sister Catherine Bennett in her 'part hut, part tent shack' at Yallourn, 1923. It was built for her by the men soon after her arrival, utilising discarded packing boards." Original source of this photo: Rev P.H. Dicker Collection, Anglican Diocese of Gippsland.

#### BRIEF NOTES ON SISTER CATHERINE BENNETT

- Catherine Eva Bennett was born at Mile End, East London in 1888.
- Catherine served as a nurse, with the Red Cross, during the Great War. There is a suggestion that Catherine also served in Serbia in 1919.
- In 1921, Catherine immigrated to Australia.
- Catherine was appointed, by Bishop George Harvard Cranswick (St Paul's Cathedral, Sale) to commence duties, as an Anglican Medical Sister, in the Yallourn area in 1923...

*"According to Archdeacon Ray Elliott in his The Deaconesses of Gippsland, Sister Bennett was appointed to Yallourn in 1923. Her work before that, presumably in the Diocese of Gippsland, is currently unknown.*

*He writes that Sister Bennett took up residence in a "part hut, part tent shack", built by the men to serve as a residence and clinic.*

*The church was unable to support her financially, so she lived on her own means until a fund was established into which the miners*

*paid two shillings a week. "Her job was to look after the medical needs of a community, which because of its crude housing and living conditions had more than its fair share of sickness".*

*At Yallourn she was also working with the newly appointed Reverend Percy Hensby Dicker, whose photographs of her in Yallourn provide another dimension to the few details we have for Catherine." Source: Linda Barraclough. Author and historian.*

- Illness throughout the community at Yallourn was common; and often stemmed from the harsh living conditions and poor hygiene in the camps. Unfortunately, funds were paltry; and in an attempt to overcome a shortage of medical resources, a Church Nurse Fund was established to assist Catherine's noble work in the settlement.
- In January 1925, Catherine married Rev. Walter Asbury Smith at St John's Church in Yallourn. According to Yallourn's eminent historian, Prue McGoldrick, the people of Yallourn and district took up a collection, of one hundred pounds, and presented it to Catherine as a farewell present and a token of their appreciation for her selfless devotion to others.
- In that same year, a meeting was called at the Mess Room at the West Camp to urge the SEC to appoint a resident doctor to the town. This meeting would, in time, lead to the appointment of Dr James Moore Andrew to the position of Resident Medical Officer at Yallourn.



**Title of photograph: Rev. R.A. Smith Sister Catherine 1925.**

**The marriage ceremony was conducted by Rev. Dicker of Yallourn**

**Source: Rev. P. H. Dicker Collection**



Text which accompanied this photograph as written by Linda Barraclough: "Catherine Eva Bennett married the Rev Walter Ashbury Smith at St John's at Yallourn on 10 January 1925. The wrist watch she is wearing was a source of pride for nurses." Source: Rev. P. H. Dicker Collection.

- It is documented Walter and Catherine also travelled to India.
- In 1928, Walter and Catherine Smith returned to England.
- On their return to England, Walter ministered at various parishes.
- Catherine died in the county of Surrey in 1968 (80 years of age) and Walter passed away in 1984. Walter and Catherine were survived by two children.
- The following quotation, as written by Linda Barraclough, is a fitting summary of Catherine's dedicated work for the people of Yallourn in those early days of settlement ...

*"Hers was a life of service, with only a few important years at Yallourn. Her service there, as a leading woman in the community, and a nurse, is probably unmatched in Gippsland."*

#### **NOTES: REGARDING REVEREND P.H. DICKER**

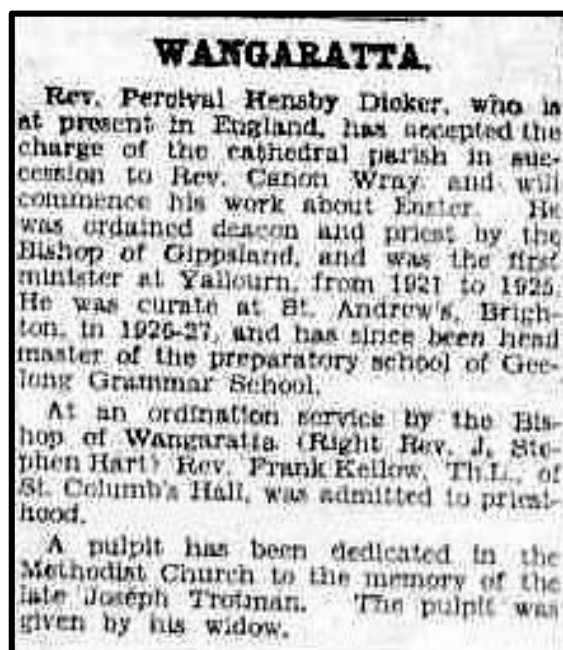
- Reverend Percy Hensby Dicker (born: 1891) was the first resident Anglican Minister at Yallourn. His photograph collection is an important resource in tracking the early days of the town of Yallourn.

- Reverend Dicker was an energetic member of the clergy and his work for all the people of the parish was far-reaching. Many of the community assets and organizations stemmed from his dynamism and generous spirit.
- It is recorded that Rev. Dicker conducted the first church service at Yallourn, under a pine tree, in January 1922.
- Rev. Dicker was a central figure in raising funds to build St John's Church. The photograph (below) shows Rev. Dicker and Bishop Creswick at the ceremony to mark the laying of the foundation stone of St John's in 1923.



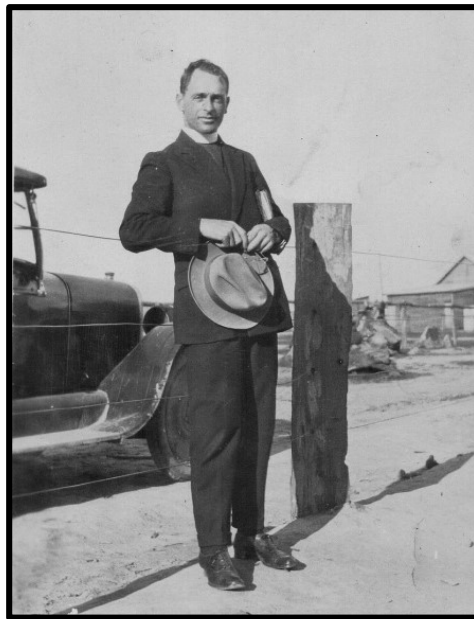
Title of the photograph: 'P.H. D Bishop C. Rev S.T. Day Rev A. J Smith.'  
Foundation Stone Ceremony -St John's Church in 1923.

- In 1925, Rev. Dicker left Yallourn and after stints at St Andrew's in Brighton, Geelong Grammar School and England, he accepted the position of Rev. Canon of Wangaratta in 1934.



Source: 'The Age' 29 December 29th 1934. Page 14.

- In 1938, Canon Dicker returned to Morwell Bridge for the opening the new Church Hall.
- According to the Victorian Government Gazette (June 7<sup>th</sup>-1972), the Venerable Percy Hensby Dicker M.A, Th.I, D B.D, Dip ED, was awarded an OBE.
- Canon Dicker died in 1975.
- Reverend Dicker's collection of photographs and a comprehensive article about the life of Sister Catherine Bennett can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1755971574632862/permalink/2801402536756422/>
- This photograph of Reverend Dicker was taken in 1922 (probably at Yallourn).



Source of this photograph: Tim Gibson (who is the archivist for the Anglican Diocese of Gippsland) and Linda Barraclough's research entitled : 'Gippsland Studies.'

## CAN YOU HELP?

When Catherine Bennett (Smith) left Yallourn in 1925, her nursing duties were continued by Sister Beatrice Chamberlain. Unfortunately, there is little documentation regarding Beatrice's time at Yallourn.

Virtual Yallourn records indicate that family named 'Chamberlain' lived in Yallourn; and students with a family name 'Chamberlain' attended Yallourn High School in the 1940's.

Perhaps Chamberlain Road in Newborough has some connection with Beatrice? Perhaps Beatrice was a relative of the famous Beatrice Chamberlain (1862-1918), a British educationalist (and hence her half-brother Neville).

There may be readers who can assist with further information regarding Beatrice; and Julie would be most appreciative to gain any articles about the topic. Thank you.

Sadly, with the passage of time, Catherine Eva Bennett has become a forgotten figure in the history of Yallourn. However, her story is significant and deserves to be placed on records for future generations to appreciate.

Any readers who can add further information regarding Catherine Bennett are kindly asked to contact Julie at Virtual Yallourn. Thank you for any assistance you can offer in this matter.

## **OTHER ARTICLES OF INTEREST REGARDING MEDICAL STAFF AT YALLOURN**

Further articles about Dr Hugh Mitchell, Dr James Moore Andrew and Matron Madge Allan can be found on this website by following these links:

<http://www.virtualyallourn.com/stories/newspapers-1923-case-doctor-yallourn-dr-hugh-mitchell-and-dr-james-andrew>

<http://www.virtualyallourn.com/node/33184>

Other photographs of the nursing staff of the Yallourn Hospital can be found at:

<http://www.virtualyallourn.com/search/node?keys=nurses>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

1. National Library of Australia- 'The Age', 'The Morwell Advertiser' and other newspapers of that period.
2. Linda Barraclough-Historian and author.
3. Gippsland History website.
4. 'Yallourn Was' by Prue McGoldrick
5. Articles as posted on the Virtual Yallourn website.

This article, for the Virtual Yallourn website, was researched and written by Roger Spaul and presented and posted by Julie George in August 2021.

Any assistance that readers can offer in building the history files of Virtual Yallourn is greatly valued and appreciated. Thank you.