

JERICHO CHURCH

c.1864 - 1932



Contemporary records show the first man to take charge of the mission of “Wood’s Point and Jordan Districts,” was Father Patrick Kavanagh, whose pastoral duties included the area from Jamieson to Red Jacket. He first travelled to Jericho on 21st Feb 1863 to hear confessions and administer confirmation.

Reference is made to the “Jericho Catholic Chapel”, built in 1864 as the first place of Divine Worship in that district. While the Chapel was still being built; it seems that Father Kavanagh performed several marriages in the makeshift building. Frances McInerney and James Barry were wed at the Jericho Roman Catholic Chapel in December 1883. In November 1864, marriage was also celebrated at the Chapel, between Francis O’Brien and Mary Maloney.

The Jericho Chapel, however, was in fear of literally being undermined, when still in its infancy. In January 1865, Ah Quay, a Chinese miner found himself in the Warden’s Court to prevent further work by this miner in the ground contiguous to the Roman Catholic Chapel. It was in danger of yielding should a flood come (a very likely event). The miner was directed not to work nearer than three feet to the chapel and that he should fill up any holes after working the ground to a distance of ten feet from the building.

Father Kavanagh spent 16 months around the mining settlements administering to the sick and poor, and laying the groundwork for religious wellbeing. When he left, newly erected chapels were to dot the landscape from Jamieson to Jericho, a tribute to the fine work by the pioneering priest.

Father Kavanagh continued his great work till November 1867, when he had to resign because of his failing health. The inhabitants of Jericho had a special send-off meeting and a money collection as a “..*Grateful tribute of veneration and esteem and our appreciation of the many services he has rendered while in the ranges...*”.

Later on the Jericho Chapel fell into neglect.

In March 1900 Rev Father Hoyne paid his first visit to Jericho and following the Mass, a committee was formed with Father Hoyne as president and Henry J.Bennett as secretary. It was decided to make a collection in the district for the rebuilding of the Roman Catholic Church. Just short of a year, a larger church was built on this site. It was still in operation for occasional services until the 1920s when visiting parish priests came in from Wood’s Point. The church building was last officially used in 1932 following the accidental death of miner Herbert Bennett.

Source: Rodgers, J.G., 1998, ‘Jericho on the Jordan: a Gippsland Goldfields History’
Rudi Paoletti, “Gold for the Taking, A Pictorial History of the Heyday of the Walhalla-Wood’s Point Gold Belt, 2007”.
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