

## THE REV. W. B. CLARKE IN ILLAWARRA

The Reverend William Branwhite Clarke, known in Australian history as a discoverer of gold and famed in the country's scientific history for his work as a geologist, was born in England in 1798, and educated first at his father's school and later at Cambridge where he obtained the degree of M.A. His interest in geology was shown early, and continued throughout the rest of his life. He was ordained in 1821, married in 1832, but his clerical and domestic ties did not prevent him doing some quite useful geological work in England before, as the result of a combination of ill-health and lack of prospects for advancement in England, he decided to emigrate to Australia.

Arriving in Sydney in May, 1839, he early obtained an appointment as headmaster at The Kings School, Parramatta, where he remained until August, 1840. It was whilst he was there he made his excursion through Illawarra.

Clarke had incumbencies at Dural and Castle Hill to 1844, Campbelltown to 1846, and in that year he was inducted to the new parish of St. Leonards near Sydney where he remained for the rest of his life.

Notwithstanding the continual duties of a busy parish which in its earliest stages comprised an area of 200 square miles, Clarke found time to devote to his geological and general scientific studies. The most spectacular of his achievements was in relation to gold, which although found in small quantities by McBrien in 1823 and Strzelecki in 1839, was discovered in a far more worthwhile quantity by Clarke near Lithgow in February, 1841. The famous story will be remembered how Clarke showed a specimen to Sir George Gipps as Governor, who on being told where it had been discovered said, "Put it away or we will all have our throats cut!" So the discovery was kept secret until Hargraves made his own discovery later, the secret was out, and the gold rushes began.

Clarke did many months of work preparing a geological survey for the Government on the gold bearing areas of New South Wales, which was not only a great feat of science but of physical endurance as well. His methods of examining the country were to change parishes with other rectors and spend all his spare time on geological excursions. His ill-health continued almost undiminished throughout his long life, and the wonder is he was able to get through so much himself. He reported that in 39 years of geological labour he had never had an hour's assistance in the field from any individual. And yet his work was incessant.

The extent of his labours can be seen from the great variety and extent of his publications. Probably his most important work, even greater than in relation to gold, was his study of the coal fields of New South Wales. His publications formed the basis of all our subsequent knowledge of the subject, and Clarke received acclaim from scientists such as Sir T. W. Edgeworth David, the great Professor de Koninck, and many others. Professor David in his monumental work on the coal fields wrote of Clarke's work in this regard that there had been nothing in it which could be altered and up to the time he wrote little could be added to Clarke's discoveries on the subject.

Clarke's interest in geology led him to make valuable findings in relation to all minerals, and it was subsequently said that the geological map he was able to produce would have cost the Government from £10,000 to £15,000.

Clarke showed interest in meteorology, the discovery of Australia through its explorers, and in all branches of science, where he performed a great service by writing many articles, in addition to his scientific papers, popularising an interest in scientific discovery.

Clarke was a humane man with wide human interests. Amongst many others, he took a considerable sociological as well as scientific interest in our aborigines. He was humorous, plucky, highly energetic and industrious, and personally very good company; his many kindnesses beyond his everyday clerical work included answering queries from miners and gold-seekers throughout the country, all of them regarding him in consequence with special affection.

His death occurred in 1878, the wonder being that his ill-health did not take toll of him earlier. He was greatly honoured, not only in his own profession but in scientific circles, and was voted in his last years a Government grant of £3,000 for his work. He was one of the principal founders of the Royal Society of New South Wales, was awarded the Murchison Medal for geology in 1877, and in 1876 had been made a Fellow of the Royal Society of England, it being said at the time that Clarke had founded the geology of a new continent.

Unfortunately, it is not possible here to cover in great detail his journey through Illawarra, which is described in his diary. This diary, and in fact all the information used in this paper, is amongst the treasured possessions of the Mitchell Library or the Dixon Gallery. The journey may be summarised as follows:

Leaving his home at Parramatta on 31st December, 1839, Clarke travelled through Liverpool to Campbelltown the first day, spending a bad night there owing to the vermin he had to put up with in the inn. (He killed "52 mosquitos, 1 tarantula, 1 Centipede, a dozen or so of fleas"). The next day, New Year's Day, he travelled only as far as Appin where he stayed with friends. On 2nd January, 1840, he left for Illawarra, travelling along O'Brien's Road from Appin to the back of Mount Keira, in the course of which he had to negotiate Jordan's Pass. He gives a long description of his difficulties, it being a matter of hours before he could get his horse to cross. This was not unusual; carriages could not hope to negotiate the pass, and accidents there were frequently fatal. Clarke noted as he travelled down O'Brien's Road into Wollongong bits of coal and describes Wollongong as it then was. He stayed at the Wollongong Hotel which was in Market Street (probably where the Queen's Hall Flats now are) and expressed himself as being "mightily pleased with what I saw of Wollongong, a place 5 years since not in existence".

On the following day he geologised with Mr. Dana, a member of the U.S. Scientific Expedition then in Sydney, and on January 4th geologised again. He rode up the beach to Towradgi, geologised further, watched the steamer loading and leave for Sydney, and at 9 p.m. left to see a corroboree which was attended not only by local blacks but by others from as far afield as Kiama, Brisbane Water, and Newcastle. The corroboree was not of any religious or tribal significance, the subject of the dance being "that the white men came to Sydney in ships and landed the horses in the salt water". Clarke gives interesting observations on the religious and general outlook of the blacks.

On the following day, Sunday, he attended church conducted by the Rev. Matthew Devenish Meares, and on Monday, January 6th, left with a party to travel down the coast. Clarke refers to the giant tree at Figtree which was revered by the blacks, and after taking lunch with Dr. Alick Osborne at Daisybank, Dapto, they travelled hard towards their destination—Mr. Meares' "station" in Kangaroo Valley, crossing the mountains by Osborne's Butter Track. He gives a vivid picture of the living conditions at the "station" where they stayed, the hospitality being good and the comforts very few, but after so much hard travelling by horseback over rough country they considered themselves extremely well found.

Next day they travelled some 30 miles across the mountains from "the Kangaroo Ground", as it was called, to Coolangatta, where they stayed at Alexander Berry's homestead, which they left in the afternoon of the following day, January 8th, for Kiama. Clarke found this area geologically of great interest, and he gives a long geological description of the Blowhole and character of the rocks thereabouts, as well as further up the coast. Here he was most interested, and concerned, at the impact on the blacks of white man's civilisation.

After these investigations, which took place on Thursday, 9th January, the party left via Jamberoo for Wollongong, which was reached the same day, and Clarke himself then left for home, returning by the same route, but with better luck at Jordan's Pass. He arrived home on Saturday, 11th January.

The Journal shows a lively interest in everything that was seen, whether of geological, topographical, sociological or purely general interest. The diary includes hurried sketches made by Clarke to illustrate points of interest, and slides of many of these sketches were shown. After the talk the approximately contemporary scene in Wollongong was illustrated by reproductions of John Rae's sketches of Wollongong in 1851, the attractive originals of which are in the Dixson Gallery. Also shown was the sketch made by Major (later Sir Thomas) Mitchell from his 1832 sketch book (Mitchell Library).

To give examples of the fine qualities, historical and otherwise, of the diary, it is hoped that permission will be obtained from the Trustees of the Mitchell Library to publish extracts in subsequent bulletins.