

JOHN SIMMONS : BUILDING CONTRACTOR:

Born in Westminster, London, in December 1830, John Simmons was apprenticed in the great building firm which was building the Houses of Parliament and there he developed a taste and skill in the art of stone carving which was to become well-known in the Kiama district.

In March 1857 he sailed for Melbourne in the clipper ship "Red Jacket." There were nearly 500 passengers aboard, including many young Irishmen on their way to the Victorian goldfields. According to his diary John did not find his fellow-passengers congenial company, nor did the captain who, on April 15, issued a notice threatening some of the passengers with the terror of a Brazilian prison. On June 9 the "Red Jacket" reached Melbourne.

There is no clue to John's activities in Melbourne or to the length of his stay there but by December 1859 he was in Newtown, Sydney, in partnership with Thomas Moon. Their tender for the building of the Presbyterian Church at Kiama was accepted and so it happened that John Simmons came to the town where he was to spend the rest of his life.

He married Margaret Andrew and they had a family of three sons and four daughters. The Presbyterian Church was commenced early in 1860 and took three years to complete. From the beginning John's work must have made a favourable impression for Stephen Major got him to design the shop in Manning Street known as the arcade, which was established in 1862. Most of John Simmons' records have been destroyed and in addition to the two already mentioned we know of only five other buildings with which he was connected during the years 1860 to 1884.

In March 1865 he built the brick and shingle Church of the Resurrection at Jamberoo, based on a plan by E. T. Blacket. This was followed by G. L. Fuller's home at Dunmore which was ready for occupation in 1868. Jamberoo's public school and teacher's residence were built in 1876 and in the same village John designed the Protestant Hall for the Orange Lodge.

We are fortunate to have a record of John's work between 1884 and 1891. In those seven years he built the E. S. & A. Bank at Albion Park and the Church of England at Shellharbour, planned a church school at Gerringong, the Kiama Agricultural Association's buildings, Mr. Alexander Campbell's factory, the Gerringong Butter Factory, built two houses and planned eighteen others and, in addition to other smaller jobs, did a considerable amount of stone-carving for local cemeteries.

The homes built for Henry Honey in Thompson Street, and for Kieran Ryan in Bong Bong Street, Kiama, show the pleasing features and durability of John's work in this field.

For a period of three years, commencing in December 1886, he served as an alderman of Kiama Council.

He died of influenza in 1893 and was buried in Porter's Garden Cemetery, North Kiama. Alderman Love said of him that he had at all times a high sense of what was right; he had found him to be a good, kind-hearted man in whose death the district had lost a good citizen.