



AUSTRALIAN ANGLICAN  
CHURCH CALENDAR

## St Mary's, Burra, SA



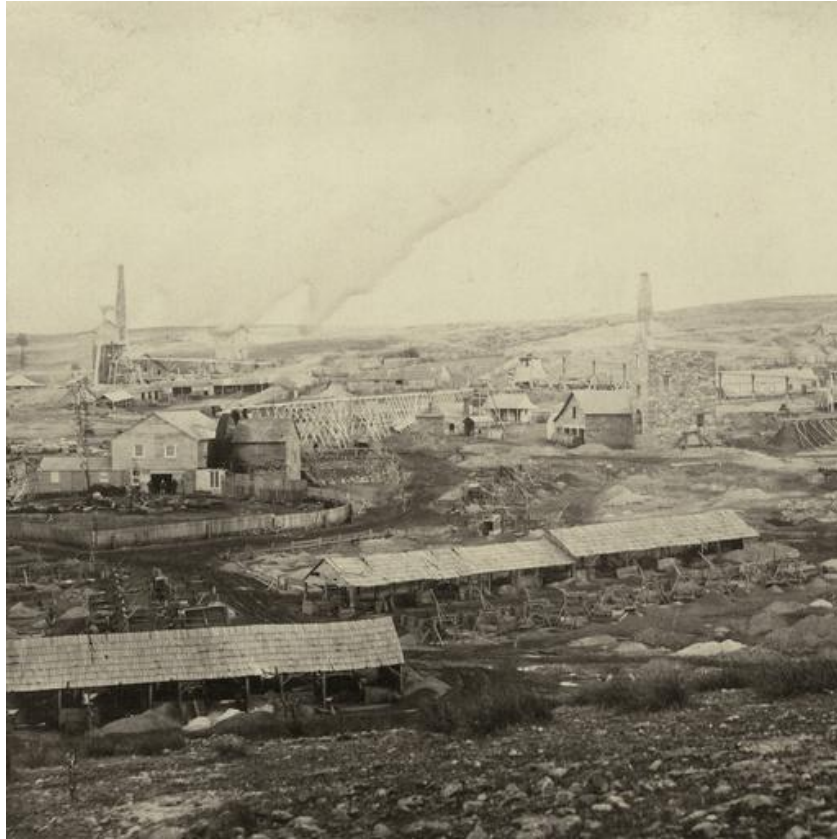
Source: State Library of South Australia

St Mary's, Burra, is a very beautiful church in a most interesting rural location. The photo above is from the State Library of South Australia and dated approximately 1880.

Burra, in the mid-North of South Australia, grew up in the early days of the State's European settlement, due to discovery of its rich copper reserves. Copper mining substantially saved the struggling new Colony, having been founded on a somewhat utopian 'free settler' concept which, despite good agricultural prospects, was hard to translate into economic success. The photo below is a panoramic view of the Burra Copper Mine, dating around 1870. It depicts Morphet's engine house and a winding house seen in the centre. On the left is the ore crushing house. Concentrating sheds are seen in the foreground. This image is again from the State Library of South Australia.



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The tale of copper's discovery grips the imagination. Two shepherds on local sheep-runs found samples of the metal in 1845, walked about 150km to Adelaide and presented them to prominent settler (and later SA Premier) Henry Ayers, who obtained a 20,000 acres land grant. This was divided between two groups of Adelaide lease-holders known as the 'Nobs' and 'Snobs'. Ayers led the management of the largest, so-called Monster Mine, a vast and spectacular excavation, which opened in 1848 and drew miners from many places, most notably Cornwall and Wales. It produced about 50,000 tonnes of copper metal between 1845-1870. Below shows the excavation of the landscape for the Copper Mine as it is seen today. This photo was taken last year by Helena Hughes who is one of our team members producing the Australian Anglican Church Calendar and who writes the basis of these Calendar Church Histories.



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By 1851 the population of Burra had risen to 5,000, at the time Australia's largest inland settlement. All was not peaceful, however. Very soon the hard-pressed miners held the first significant workers' strike recorded in Australia. Housing was makeshift in several villages around the outskirts of the mine. The most basic accommodation, in the 'company town' of Kooringa which would not permit freehold land, was dugouts along the creek bank that can still be seen today. These two dugouts below have been restored by the National Trust as a tourist attraction.



Great profits were reaped from the outset of Copper Mining, leading to investment in public buildings and amenities in the various settlements. However, many workers left in the 1850s to seek gold in the eastern States. The venture's profitability diminished over time and the Monster Mine closed in 1877, although there were some minor efforts to revive it later on. The actual township of Burra, incorporating most of the scattered neighbourhoods, was formed only in 1940.





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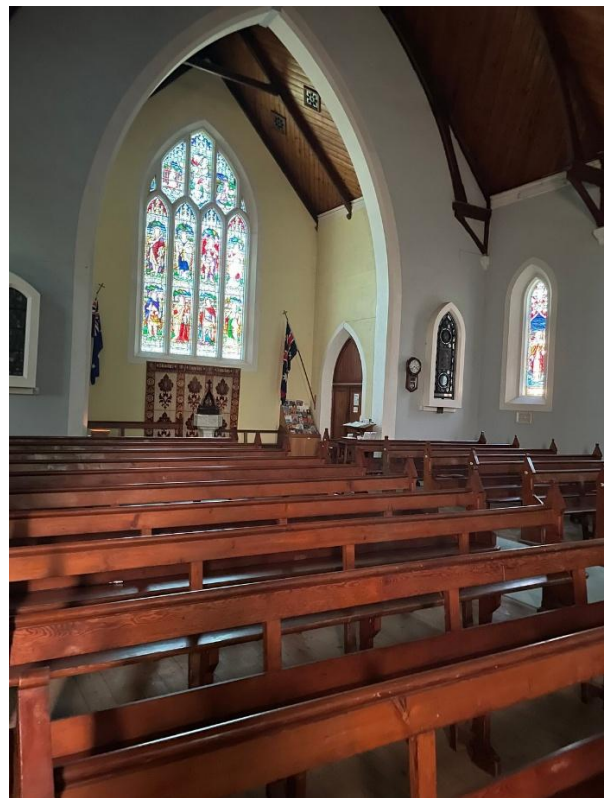
Below is the Savings bank of SA, in Burra, 1848. Beside it is a photo of the site of the draper's shop in Burra in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1858, W. H. Stanbury had a general store here until it was destroyed by fire in 1864. It became Coopers Butcher in 2009.



The first St Mary's Anglican Church opened in 1849 in the south while the northern settlement of Redruth planned its own Anglican church. The latter progressed little further than laying the foundation stone. By the late 1870s there was support for a larger, more central church. The SA Mining Association donated land on Market Street for the church to be built in a high position between the main town and the mine. The full cost of \$4,000 was generously subscribed by the populace. Below, in the background, is the first church of St Mary in 1872.



The present St Mary's was designed in the Gothic style by architect G F McLagan, previously of Melbourne, and erected in high quality local stone by builders Sara & Dunstan. It has soaring, light-filled arched ceilings and some outstanding windows by Edward Brooks, SA's first stained- glass maker. Other windows include a magnificent memorial to soldiers who fell in World War I, shipped from England, and a charming commemorative 'Children's Window' brought from the earlier Anglican church. Below are photographs of the sanctuary and church in 2023 found on Trip Advisor.



The opening of the new St Mary's Church in 1879 was clearly momentous. Bishop Augustus Short of Adelaide presided, many clergy attended, and worshippers filled the church's 350 seats. A succession of services concluded with a concert in the Institute Hall. So great was the occasion that the organist from St Peter's Cathedral, Adelaide, came to take part with his choristers. The Adelaide Advertiser described the atmosphere as "most perfect goodwill and kindly feelings". The church's pipe organ was replaced by a Dodd instrument in 1905.





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Burra today is the centre of a prosperous sheep-raising district, enjoying its claim as the 'Merino Capital of the World'. With the population fallen to about 1,000, the town's old buildings, mining relics and overall character are exceptionally well-preserved. Parts of the movie 'Breaker Morant' (1979) were filmed here, notably at the 1856 Redruth Gaol, photographed below.





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This year Burra will mark the 180th anniversary of the discovery of copper that put it on the map. As part of planned 'Back to Burra' festivities, St Mary's will host a Community Church Service at 10.00 am on Sunday 18 May. The town's beauty and unique history draw constant streams of visitors, many of whom are made welcome at St Mary's. We wish then much happiness in celebrating this milestone of their very special town. Below is a photograph of Helena Hughes chatting with Revd Anne Elizabeth Ford last year in the church. Anne Elizabeth is Priest with Oversight in the Parish of Riverton, including St Mary's, Burra.

