One Hundred and Nineteenth Anniversary of
Proclamation of Bathurst.

Address by K. R. CRAMP, O.B.E., M.A.

MAY 6, 1934.

I am pleased to be with you to-day, and to have the opportunity and honour of representing the Royal Australian Historical Society in delivering the address at this celebration of an historical occasion so important in the story of Australian development. My pleasure is the greater because some few years ago I was associated with the movement that culminated in the erection of this memorial. When visiting Bathurst about seven years ago I attended a committee that was considering the question of a memorial; and when at a later date your Committee accepted the Royal Australian Historical Society’s offer of a tablet, it fell to me, as a representative of that Society, to word the tablet and have it sent to you.

This memorial takes us back in thought to those years when the key that unlocked the way across the mountainous barrier between the eastern coastlands and the western tablelands had not been discovered. It calls to mind the names of Governor Phillip, Captain Tench, Dr. Bass, Hacking, Caley, Wilson and Barrallier, all of whom were interested in the great mountain problem, but none of whom could solve it. It also calls to mind the controversy that is even now carried on spasmodically as to who was the first to cross the mountains; whether the credit of the victory is due to Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, or to George William Evans. To my mind this discussion is unnecessary, and the solution simple. If we will recollect that in 1813 (while the Duke of Wellington was entering the final stages of the Peninsular War against the Napoleonic forces amongst the mountains of Spain) this little group of three Australian explorers set out from St. Marys, crossed the Emu Ford on the Nepean, and climbed the ridges of the Blue Mountain Spur, past Glenbrook, Woodford, Katoomba, Mount Victoria, down the steep, rugged slopes of Mount York, even to Mount Blaxland, with its extensive and attractive views of undulating country of forests and grasslands sufficient to maintain the colony’s stock for many years to come—if we but recollect this, we must admit that this trio had at least conquered the Blue Mountains. But to the west of them still lay the untraversed Main Range. George Evans, with a party of five men, picking up the tracks of Blaxland’s party, came to Mount Blaxland, and continued his westerly journey across the River Lett, up and over the ridge of the Great Divide, along the Fish, Campbell and Macquarie Rivers till this magnificent district was reached. In short, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson were the first to cross the Blue Mountains. Evans was the first the cross the Main Range, and his title to be the discoverer of the Bathurst Plains is undisputed, and has been fittingly recognised in the statue erected to his memory in your City Square.

Macquarie recognised the earlier party’s claim when he wrote:—

The Governor is happy to embrace this opportunity of conveying his acknowledgments to Gregory Blaxland, William Charles Wentworth, and Lieutenant William Lawson for their enterprising and arduous exertions on their tour of discovery which they voluntarily performed, being the first Europeans to accomplish the passage over the Blue Mountains.

Evans’ comments as he journeyed are worthy of being recollected. Of the O’Connell Plains, which he named after the Lieutenant-Governor, he wrote:—

This plain is worth speaking of. The clear land occupies about a mile on each side of the river, and it far surpasses in fertility any I have seen.

A little further on he refers to excellent land with the best grass I have ever seen; it might be mowed, it is so thick and long. I called this the Bathurst Plains.

The importance of the achievements of the explorers I have mentioned can scarcely be over-estimated. For a quarter of a century after Governor Phillip planned his first settlement in 1788 the community was confined to the
narrow coastal belt, where the wheat was beginning to suffer from rust and the sheep from foot-rot. These western slopes proved the salvation of the colony, and provided immense scope for its expansion and enrichment. To-day the wealth of Australia lies mainly in its wool and wheat, and these are of such high quality as to ensure the well-being of the whole community. And this happy state of affairs has been rendered possible by the wonderful work of these explorers.

It was fortunate that the colony was governed in 1813 by the enterprising Lachlan Macquarie, for within a few months he set Lieutenant William Cox the task of constructing the road to connect this new district with the older settlements. Cox was a magistrate at Windsor, and had estates at Clarendon and Mulgoa. He was commissioned to build the road from Emu Plains to Bathurst, clearing it to be twenty feet wide and the roadway twelve feet. He commenced operations on July 18, 1814, and, wonderful to relate, had completed the task by January 21, 1815; that is to say, one hundred and one and a half miles of road were constructed within six months by a party of from twenty to twenty-eight men, the whole being done without the loss of a man and without serious accident. The most interesting section of the work was at the steep descent down Mount York, where the road had a grade of one in four. In the description given at the time of its construction, it was such a road as a cart can go down empty or with a very light load without possibility of its being able to return with any sort of load whatever.

Governor Macquarie was thoroughly appreciative of the efforts of the explorers and road-builder, and in a letter written by him he expressed his appreciation. This letter may be read in *Australian Milestones*, a work written by H. M. Suttor, a name familiar to the residents of Bathurst. Macquarie wrote:

"The Governor is at a loss to appreciate fully the services rendered by Mr. Cox to this colony in the execution of this arduous work which promises to be of the greatest public utility by opening a new source of revenue to the industrious and enterprising. When it is considered that Mr. Cox voluntarily relinquished the comforts of his own house, and the society of his numerous family, and exposed himself to much personal fatigue with only such temporary covering as a bark hut can afford from the inclemency of the weather, it is difficult to express the sentiments of approbation to which such privation and services are entitled.

To make himself personally acquainted with the new country west of the mountains, Macquarie decided on a tour of inspection. While on the other side of the globe Napoleon was making his final desperate and feverish struggle to hold on to the throne of France—a struggle that ended two months later in his Waterloo, and exactly one hundred years to the day before the world-famous Anzaes climbed the heights of Gallipoli—Governor Macquarie, on April 25, 1815, left Sydney to climb the great Austral heights that had just yielded a reluctant passage to the intrepid explorers. His tour was a march of triumphal progress. He was accompanied by Mrs. Macquarie and some of the most distinguished gentlemen in the colony, namely, Sir John Jamison, Mr. Campbell (the Colonial Secretary), Captain Antill, Lieutenant William Cox (the maker of the road), Lieutenant Watts (aide-de-camp), Dr. Redfern (Assistant Surgeon to the Colony), Mr. Meegan, Mr. J. W. Lewin (the artist whose sketches of the trip are still of considerable interest), and J. Oxley (whose fame as an explorer was still in the future).

After a leisurely journey of twelve days the party arrived at the Macquarie River, and on May 7, as you are informed by the memorial before you, he fixed upon a site for a western town, which he named Bathurst, after the British Secretary of War and the Colonies.

It should be a matter of satisfaction to the residents of Bathurst to learn that their worthy city, which has ever been regarded as the Queen City of the West, should be named after a worthy gentleman, a statesman of high standing, intelligence and probity. Born in 1762, and receiving a University education through Christ's College, Oxford, he became an intimate friend of William Pitt, the younger, Prime Minister of England. In 1793 he engaged in politics, first as a member of the House of Commons and later of the House of Lords. After some experience as Foreign Secretary, he became Minister for War and the Colonies while Wellington was faced with the problem of expelling the French from the Spanish Peninsula during the Napoleonic Wars. It is of interest
to us to learn that the Iron Duke found him to be the best and most intelligent of all the War Ministers with whom he had dealings during his long war service. As war made less demand upon his time and attention, he became increasingly interested in Australia, and developed such a high sense of public duty that he could never forgive any man who permitted personal interests and jealousies to interfere with the demands of public service. This was the splendid man after whom your beautiful city was appropriately named.

Governor Macquarie took twelve days to reach Bathurst, and eight days to return to Sydney. The hardships of the journey caused him to be somewhat gloomy in his prognostications of the future of the West; he declared that the difficulties of travelling would prevent the centre of the colony from supporting more than an isolated population by pastoral pursuits. Wentworth, five years later, was equally discouraging; for though he stressed the excellence of the land for pastoral purposes, he considered that the difficulties of land carriage would always prevent the West from assuming an agricultural character. The cost of carriage was often as much as £50 per ton.

These difficulties of travel were very apparent when, in 1822, Mr. T. F. Hawkins, with his wife, eight children ranging from twelve and a half years to twelve months in age, together with Mrs. Hawkins' aged mother of seventy, travelled in a waggon and drays drawn by bullocks and horses from Sydney to the Bathurst district, bringing with them household effects and agricultural implements. Sometimes the road was so steep and difficult that the bullocks refused to pull their loads, until the dogs harassed them into doing so. On one occasion they had to pitch camp on the dark, damp, dirty road; at the big hill, Mount York, a dray overturned, and was saved from plunging over the precipice by a tree stump. Later the cavalcade crossed a river with the water reaching to the horses' bodies. But after eighteen strenuous days the little mother established her sturdy family in "home sweet home" two miles from Bathurst, and in later years a granddaughter of hers became the wife of a Bathurst celebrity, Sir Francis Bathurst Suttar.

Of the three original mountain explorers, Lieutenant Lawson was appointed the first Commandant of Bathurst district, and from here he set out on other exploratory trips, principally to the Mudgee district. The first grant of land was made on March 22, 1814, to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Maurice O'Connell, of the 73rd Regiment. At first there was a tendency for the main settlement to make its way Kelso-wards, especially as town lands were covered by a Government reserve. But when Governor Bourke gave instructions that these lands were to be opened up without delay, the drift from Bathurst ceased. The first land sale of town lots was conducted in 1833 by Mr. Busby.

Your memorial indicates that the first Divine service was held in this vicinity after the proclamation of Bathurst on May 7, 1815. Later, a barn with a thatched roof near Bathurst was regularly used for the purpose, and its register dates back to 1825. The first service in it was conducted on October 13, 1822, by Rev. Samuel Marsden, whose son-in-law, Rev. Thomas Hassall, was appointed as the first clergyman of the West. The barn gave place to a properly constructed church on the same site, and on Easter Day, 1835, Holy Trinity Church, Kelso, was opened by Marsden. (The consecration service by Bishop Broughton was not till December 3, 1836.) In 1840 a minister was appointed to the non-existent parish church at Bathurst, but the foundation stone was not laid till 1845, and services first held in the new building in 1848 (consecrated 1849). In 1870, it became the Cathedral Church of the Bathurst Diocese.

The gloomy prognostications of Macquarie and Wentworth have not been fulfilled. The difficulties of communication and transport were somewhat overcome when the Mount York track gave place first to the Sir Thomas Mitchell road, and then in 1923 to the Berghofer Pass, both with a much more negotiable grade. But of even greater significance was the opening of the railway. The first sod of the first railway in New South Wales was in 1850, turned by Governor Fitzroy's daughter. The Sydney–Parramatta Junction railway was opened in 1855; but another twenty-one years elapsed before the train ran to Bathurst. The line from Parramatta to Bathurst cost
£2,112,000. On April 4, 1876, another Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, formally declared the line opened, and the days of the old stage-coach were numbered. The Governor, in his address on the occasion, accurately represented the position when he said:—

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the influence this great work is destined to exercise upon the future of this part of the country. The profits of those who engaged in agricultural and pastoral pursuits will be largely increased; the vast mineral deposits which are situated on this side of the mountains in the shape of coal, iron and copper, can now be remuneratively developed; while the facilities which will be offered for the importation into the district of articles of commerce and luxury will add to the comforts of those who labour, by enabling them to surround the humble homes in the interior with many of the refinements of civilised life.

The forecast has been realised. The Queen City of the West is now in close touch with the Queen City of the Southern Hemisphere; the train and motor car have reduced the distance between them, while the aeroplane with its journey of two hours stands out in remarkable contrast with Macquarie's tour of twelve days.

And, best of all, Bathurst still maintains its beauty, its charm, its prestige. Its fine civic spirit is reflected in its unique City Square, adorned with fine public and religious structures, its historical statues, and its attractive gardens; while its loyalty to King and Empire is beautifully symbolised in the exquisite park of fine old English trees and its imposing tribute to the noble dead in the splendid carillon so recently constructed. The best I can wish Bathurst is that her people will live up to the traditions of her own past, and that her future may be as full of lustre as her past has been.