

STILL STANDING: DANDALOO CHURCH

Despite the best efforts of fickle Mother Nature in cahoots with the sometimes-mighty Bogan River, the tiny wooden Dandaloo Church still stands 136 years after it was built as a memorial to loved ones lost.

Located on Wiradjuri Country, 65 kilometres west of Narromine as the crow flies and not far from the direct centre of New South Wales, Australia, Dandaloo Church is the final remnant of a once bustling township immortalised in two poems by the legendary A.B. "Banjo" Paterson.

Built on the banks of the Bogan in 1888 on land adjoining the Martel Family homestead, the simple wooden structure was a "mausoleum" with a difference, which Cherubim Martel established to honour the memory of her son Charles and husband Florant. Their graves were not under the church but in the family vault near the homestead. A Martel memorial in the churchyard overlooks the Bogan.

Constructed with cypress pine and framing four stained glass windows handcrafted in France, the original structure was a simple rectangle. A memorial window in the roof cavity honours a young Martel grandson. The pulpit that remains today is purportedly the original one from the first service in mid-May 1888, but some pews have come from other chapels over time. Several graves dot the churchyard, some even pre-dating the church's construction.

As the Bogan regularly bursts its banks in periods of heavy rain, Dandaloo Church has been inundated many times during its 136-year history. Some of the graves' crosses and headstones and the Martel homestead were early victims, the latter washed away in 1905, and the church lost its original organ to flood in 1950. A porch was added during renovations in the 1960s, and in 1990, the western wall was severely impacted during yet another flood. More than a metre of water inundated the church in 2022, further eroding the foundations.

Supported and cared for by local landholders, Dandaloo Church still stands and thrives.

Locals continue to worship there on the first Sunday each month and celebrate life's special occasions. Here's to the next 136 years and beyond.