



# Historical Society

of the Uniting Church  
in South Australia

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Reverend Allan George and crew on the mission boat,  
Ranmelek, New Hanover [see p.6.]

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## **About Time for Mission 1910 and the One Hundredth Edition of the Newsletter**

2010 has been an important year for the Historical Society and our annual report to the Synod/Presbytery highlights some of the important steps in consolidating our work during the year. This newsletter is also an achievement as it is our one hundredth edition and its regular publication since January 1978 is a contribution to documenting and interpreting South Australian church history.

2010 has also been an anniversary year for many congregations and agencies of the church. The global church has been celebrating the ground breaking 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference which drew its inspiration from the great commission in Matthew 28: 19, *Go into all the world*. This conference set the mission agenda for the next 50 years and led to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Fifty years after Edinburgh the first national conference of Australian churches was held in February 1960, in Melbourne, and representatives from mainline churches articulated an adventurous mission agenda. This agenda helped to shape a holistic and integrated approach to mission for a generation.

In 1910 in South Australia *home mission* churches were being formed on the frontiers and the bequests of William Parkin began to make a significant contribution to theological education and rural mission. In summing up the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Arnold Hunt notes that, 'in ten years, united Methodism built 80 churches, enlarged 21 existing buildings, and erected 20 halls and 15 manses. Contributions to both home and foreign missions almost doubled.' (Hunt, *This side of heaven*, 1985:240). John Flynn was beginning to imagine a distinctive Australian mission to the outback and in 2011 we will be celebrating 100 years of the formation of Australian Inland Mission. We would like to hear from others of other significant moments in mission commitment. I am sure there were revivals somewhere! Remember those hymns militant ... "On Greenland's icy mountains" and "The whole wide world for Jesus"!

As we get older we have a greater appreciation of time passing, how the achievements that we celebrate today are gifts from the past. I am wondering if 2011 should be *about time for mission*. Next year South Australia will be celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European settlement and in May the History Trust will be inviting agencies and groups to join a festival month around the theme, *About Time: South Australia's History Festival*.

As we face present challenges we become more aware of the need to understand and interpret our past experiences. Church leaders and others responsible for setting future directions will discover inspiration through reflecting on the sources, influences and convictions that have brought us to this time and place. In 2011 the Historical Society will continue to serve and encourage reflection on the way churches have contributed to building a better world. We invite you to tell us about your experiences and celebrations and we hope these can then be shared with others in the wider church.

Rev Dr Dean Eland  
Editor, [djeland@bigpond.com](mailto:djeland@bigpond.com)

### **NEW APPOINTMENTS!**

**At the Historical Society's Council Meeting on 1st November:**

- The Reverend Dr Jonathan Barker was elected as Secretary, filling the vacancy left by the death earlier this year of the Rev George Potter who had been Secretary of the Society since 1996;
- The Reverend Dr Dean Eland was elected as Editor.

**We look forward to the contributions which these two members will bring to the Society.**

**Val Canty, President**

## **Our Missionary Adventure of the Sixties** **Allan and Dorothy George**

### **The Vision.**

I had a strong call to missions (sharing the good news with those who have not heard it). That was in my late teens. I was close to finishing a trade apprenticeship and considered offering myself to the church in that capacity.

Later counsel (from Rev Dan Reddin) suggested I prayerfully consider preparing myself more completely for my calling and enter the ministry. Soon thereafter I candidated for the ministry and trained at Wesley College from 1957-60.

In late 1960, I married Dorothy (Whitehead) a devout girl from the very church I grew up in at Walkerville Methodist! We were blessed with a son (Peter) within our first year of marriage, and had a second son (Graeme - now deceased) born in New Guinea in 1964. As a family of three at that stage we faced the future full of hope and faith.

### **The Preparation & Assignment 1**

After marriage and two years in Mount Gambier assisting Rev Stan Forth, I was ordained at Kent Town in October 1962. I had offered for missionary service at this stage, was accepted and sent to All Saints College in Haberfield, Sydney for six months' missionary training, before being sent to northern New Guinea in 1963.

We were designated to the isolated island of New Hanover located just off the northern tip of New Ireland. My task was to manage the church which had been functioning in this area for some 80 years from a head station at Ranmelek, where a large primary school and mission hospital had been established with an Australian teacher and medical sister. This centre served some 5000 Methodist adherents (2000 Catholics), most of whom resided along the coast of the main island (30x20 Km), with about 15 other small island communities in addition, scattered over a huge area.

There were about 50 preaching places with village pastors. There were no vehicular roads or airstrips and transportation was by sea or walking. We had a 26ft mission launch plus canoes. Communication was limited to a Telradio with a scratchy transmission to the main centre of Kavieng (New Ireland) and some other regional stations and plantations. Kavieng was the centre of government, with hospital facilities and an Australian doctor, plus Chinese traders. It was some five hours by launch across the water from Ranmelek.

As a small family we arrived at New Hanover in June 1963.

*(Comments by Dorothy:*

*Our plane trip was not that comfortable – and it was long! It was a DC6 with four engines. We travelled all night and at one point I remember looking out of the window and seeing one of the engines all red and thinking we may never get there! Peter, our 18-month old son did not have a seat and so slept across Allan, me and Bill Linggood, who was off to New Guinea too.*

*When we arrived at Rabaul, Allan was taken off immediately to the Synod at Vunarima. Peter and I were left with the Chairman's wife, Winsome Sharp, who was so kind to us. Next morning we were collecting eggs for breakfast when Winsome came across a snake. She asked me to fetch her gun and to my horror she shone her torch on the snake and then shot it and put it in a pot on the stove to cook – so that the ducks would have some nice meat to eat.*

*Eventually we were on a plane to Kavieng and then on to a launch (belonging to the plantation owner) which was loaded with rejected copra. The journey lasted for four or five hours and I still remember the smell, as we sat perched on top of the copra.*

*We had plenty of time to **think** about being missionaries on a beautiful tropical island: no friends (as yet), no loved ones, no 'mod cons', no power, no roads, no doctors (although the mission sister, Doss Pederick, was as good as a doctor), no Christian fellowship in a language I could understand and even for those who spoke English, I still could not understand.*

*The climate was hot and sticky but we were told we would get used to that. Our home was on a hilltop looking out over the sea. There were holes in the floor due to white ants; everything was painted pink – there must have been a sale of undercoat paint which the mission had grabbed! There was a population of cockroaches in the kitchen and the oven had a large hole in the side. BUT it was home and it felt good to have arrived. We were here because we had felt God's call, and we were ready for all that was to happen as we learned to love these wonderful, dark-skinned people who welcomed us in such a generous way.)*

Little known to me at the time, a South Australian minister, Rev Tom Simpson, at the same age as myself (28yrs), was sent to this isolated place some 26 yrs previously to start the head station of Ranmelek from scratch...a remarkable achievement. That was in 1937. His work has been colourfully portrayed in daughter Margaret Henderson's book, 'Yours Sincerely Tom' (2000) where Margaret's description of her father seems to apply equally to me...-“..Dad had a rudimentary education polished by a L.Th...” We both had many practical skills to supplement our educational deficiencies. The same fibrous house that Tom Simpson saw built in 1937 was later strafed by fighter Japanese planes during WW2 but it was restored and became our new home.



### **Culture Shock**

Our sudden thrust into a scene of such unfamiliarity in terms of culture and language was a huge shock to the system. But with the wise counsel of Sister Dorothy Pederick (W.A) who lived alongside us, we weathered this storm much easier. The Sister would traverse this whole island for one week each month in the mission launch mainly to tend the needs of babies.

It was some months before I felt able to offer any kind of leadership in this vast and unknown territory. There was a mail bag which came by boat once a week. Adjustment to new languages with different grammar and dialects meant I had to use the *lingua franca*, Melanesian Pidgin, to communicate and preach. When one adjusts and begins to appreciate the warmth, love and faith of this people, language barriers and other hardships and isolation pale into insignificance.

Three years later we would go back home for a furlough, and experience what we call 'reverse culture shock', and we began to look at our home society more objectively or even critically.

### **Spirituality in the Papua New Guinea Scene.**

My first impressions were less than encouraging. Most worship was a traditional hymn sandwich with little spontaneity. In each church I would find men seated to the left, with ladies to the right, and an aisle down the centre. Any loose pages from hymnal or bible were placed under the elevated pulpit looking like a rubbish deposit. The singing was always good...and the high point of our worship.

The more I appreciated the psyche of this people the more I realised that, as animists, their whole life and setting was permeated with spiritual beings...some good and many bad. I learnt to speak into this environment of spiritual insecurity, to proclaim Jesus as Lord over all other lesser (but very real) spirits. By nature they were a religious people. They revered their ancestors almost to the point of adoration. Their bible, even at this stage, was only the New Testament and was in the language of the church 'Blanche Bay dialect' of New Britain and Rabaul - not their own dialect.



Church discipline in New Hanover was consistently applied. Often members 'slipped from grace', usually on moral grounds. They would have their church membership suspended for three months. Then they were declared forgiven and reinstated with no apparent stigma thereafter.

Not having an Old Testament meant they had a limited concept of God's holiness, yet they were quite aware of his judgments. It seemed like there was a New Testament based form of legalism in this church, with the hymn book revered as much as the Bible.

I would hope that some form of revival would come to this church, and indeed it did in the late seventies. As Australians we would regularly study the scriptures and pray often with New Guinea teachers about how we could more effectively share our faith.

On 18th January, 1968 the Methodist Overseas Missions and London Missionary Society merged to form the United Church of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. As we were all Methodists anyway in this region, it came with little expectation. I duly changed a few signs around the place to reflect the change, and things went on just the same

### **President Johnson Cargo Cult and its Impact.**

This cult was researched by at least one anthropologist over some 30 yrs. Dorothy Billings' book was 'Cargo Cult as Theatre: Political performance in the Pacific'. She concluded that this movement (later Tutukuvul Isukai Assoc.) never became a cult because that was never intended by the people. She would say they dramatised their political discontent in this movement, or a mock form of cult.

Having lived through the event, we recognised some dangerous religious components in this movement. Conceding that there was a natural flair for the dramatic among this people (expressed in annual thanksgiving celebrations), the emerging cult-like movement began as a dissatisfaction with the Australian Government and the withholding of taxes. The people considered such action would help convince the Government to address their neglect of the area. Things got ugly with some small riots. But for missionary intervention in a New Ireland village, where police were attacked with crude weapons by an ugly mob, things could have seriously got out of hand. The church had to challenge its own tax defaulters, and even discipline them, while greatly sympathising with the people's concerns and frustrations.

I think it was because of the spiritual maturity of this young church that the Johnson Cargo Cult never fully gained cult status. From a letter I wrote in 1965: "this church has firmly denounced tax defaulters and all servants thus convicted are temporally dismissed from their church membership and responsibilities."

At no point did we feel any 'anti-mission' tendencies among those defaulters. However at one stage we were viewed with considerable suspicion by the Government. Once I was called to give account of the Methodist mission encouraging this movement before the District Commissioner of the Kavieng District. I was exonerated after discussions.

Two of our local preachers became prophetic leaders of the movement and claimed to be representing John the Baptist returning to earth to herald a new day of plenty. These two men were dismissed from their church roles immediately and became fugitives that Government patrols of soldiers aggressively pursued around the islands. We were on one of those islands at the time when the police rudely interrupted our church service with guns drawn seeking the two fugitive prophets. We were instantly surrounded by the people to protect us. The prophets were not to be found that day!

Thankfully this movement 'fizzed' within about two years - and the church at the time must take considerable credit for it being diffused. A new political movement emerged called Tutukuval Isukai Association which still functions in a weakened form to this day

### **Caring for an Island Leper Colony.**

The island of Enelaua was about 1 km long 500m wide with swamp around the edges. Well before the war years, the Government set apart this island for lepers only. There people would receive treatment and care from three devoted German Catholic sisters.

They lived near the wharf in a two-storeyed tropical house. Their only security being God... and a couple of dogs.

They constantly served the needs of these depressed people. There were about 100 lepers in two divisions of that island. One section was considered more contagious than the other. There was regular drug treatment given and most residents lived in that isolation for 1-3 yrs. I would visit this small island chapel for two services on a Sunday about every three months. A large percentage of the sufferers would have been Methodist members.

It was a sobering experience where I felt very humbled by their responsiveness. Seeing that disfigured group of people isolated from their extended families listening to me preach was a moving moment. They did have their own lay preachers to take worship on other occasions.

I was not permitted to shake hands with them but they had ways of showing their deep appreciation for my visit. My boat's crew boys would never leave the wharf on those occasions, but just wait for me to come back two hours later. After worship, the nuns would give me lemon juice and a sandwich in their neat residence prior to my two hour return journey home in the motor launch across the water to Ranmelek.

The population of these surrounding islands over many years was viewed by people from other districts as potential carriers of this disease. This meant that outstanding students going to Rabual for further education from this area carried an unjustified stigma because their homes were in close proximity to Enelaua.

One of our own aged retired ministers (Sition Gion) with whom I shared ministry in two circuits, contracted leprosy in early retirement (1970s) and was sent to Enelaua for 24 months of treatment. My visit during the Manggai work party (in 1974) enabled me to meet him back in his home village.

### **Mobility on Sea and Land.**

As someone less than confident on the water, it was a big learning curve to adjust to tropical waters with a metre tidal variation. I had two confident boat's crew to take me to destinations. I was totally dependent on them to navigate; they were sometimes dependent on me to maintain the air-cooled Lister engine. We were a good team as long as we each kept to our distinct areas of competence. They read the tide levels, which determined the hidden snags under the water, which at first I was completely unaware of. 'Why so much deviation on this journey?', I would lament!! Many frightening and even life threatening episodes followed in these early years. Although taken for granted, I became deeply aware of divine protection.

Our life and work revolved around the sea, the winds and the tides. Nature around us had to be respected. We faced many a sudden storm, and could but seek the Lord for mercy and guidance... to help find us a sheltered bay free from the jagged rocks. He always brought us there simply to wait out the storm.

### **Assignment 2**

In late 1966 the Church saw fit to move us into a different setting in Namatanai, New Ireland. There we would traverse a 70 km southern section of this Island on both the east and west coasts. The head station was a large plateaued area called Hallis - some 2 km south of Namatanai. Life in Namatanai was much easier with less isolation and better communication.

This circuit also involved about 30 village churches with one ordained New Guinean colleague stationed further south and sharing my leadership. Daphne Gum OBE worked with us for two years and taught our son in her class at Namatanai in '67-'68 - which complemented his correspondence lessons.

I had a Land Rover to work with and often had to ford flooded rivers in a journey south. Though this was a much safer form of transport, I was often required to ford fast-flowing rivers with water up to the engine block, creeping across the watercourse over huge river stones (4 wheels engaged) - while fully loaded with food and people. It took many hours of work with the help of a driver boy to maintain that vehicle. There were no repair garages around these parts; only a government workshop which sometimes came to the rescue.

Occasionally I also needed to traverse by launch the 40km across the water to Lihir Island (now a gold mine), which was also in the Namatanai circuit with a village pastor stationed on the island.

**Knowing it is time to move on.**

I was always aware of my limitations as a foreigner in a strange land, though the love of this people was very real and generously embraced us. They believed God had sent us to them and I was doing my best to help them. I know that even today if my 49 yr old son Peter chose to return to this area, those beautiful people would remember him and welcome him back warmly as one of their cross-cultural family under God.

My dependency on Melanesian Pidgin to communicate always kept me somewhat in the dark about delicate issues that the local dialect could reveal. Increasingly, responsible local leaders were developing their managerial and mechanical skills (their main deficiencies) to enable them to manage large circuits with equipment to monitor and maintain. Their essential skills to preach the Word and lead the people of God were far in excess of mine as a foreigner.

In the late '60s a two week period of isolation on Lihir Island, where I slept on a bamboo floor, with pigs in residence underneath me, waiting for a three day storm to abate, caused me to question the need for me to continue my serving the Lord amidst this culture. I was at this time one of only two Australian ministerial circuit leaders in this district. It became clear that it was time to move on and back into my own culture to serve the Lord.

The Methodist Conference back home saw fit in late 1969 to appoint us to Hawker Leigh Creek Circuit for a time. We began there in January 1970 at which point we were blessed to adopt a beautiful daughter (Joanne) to complete our family.

Sept 2010

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SYNOD 2010**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Historical Society serves the Synod by arranging the presentation and publishing of lectures of historical interest aimed at increasing the knowledge of church history in South Australia. In the main these lectures are available for purchase. The Society's Newsletter, published three times a year, contains historical information as well as articles on writing projects which are underway and news of the Society's activities.

Through its Council the Society administers the Uniting Church History Centre located at 44A East Avenue Black Forest. The Centre houses valuable records and memorabilia not required by the Synod to be placed in the State Library and has information for responding to enquiries on the history of local congregations of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian background as well as Uniting Church history. A display of memorabilia is available to visitors during the opening hours 1 – 4 pm of Wednesday afternoons. Some information is also to be found on the History Centre website: <http://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au>

**INTRODUCTION**

The scope of responsibility of the Historical Society is to:

- Assist the Synod in fulfilling its responsibilities to administer archival and historic records.
- Preserve Uniting Church, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian records and memorabilia.
- Provide lectures, publications and displays covering the history of the Uniting Church, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.
- Assist in the planning of anniversaries of significant historical events.

Maintain and administer property held by the Society for the purpose of a Uniting Church History Centre.

In May this year the Society recorded the sudden death of its Secretary, the Revd. George Potter, who had served in this position since 1996. During these years, with other members of the Council, he changed the direction of the Society to one that was acknowledged in the wider S.A. history community. He also worked with the group to implement the bequest of the late Colin Watson resulting in the establishment of the History Centre, Black Forest. As a representative of the Society, George visited churches and parishes throughout S.A. supporting them in recording their history and dealing with records. He always encouraged them to not only tell the story of bricks and mortar but to include the "faith journey". As a parish minister he was instrumental in seeking a Heritage grant and led the team that overviewed the restoration of the Moonta Mines Uniting (Methodist) Church in the Jubilee 150 year.

As yet the Council has not elected a Secretary.

**DISCUSSION /SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED SINCE  
OCTOBER 2009**



**Activities** of the Society in the last twelve months have included:

- Lecture by Mr Bill Linggood on his time as Plantation Manager, Ulu Plantation, New Guinea Island Region. This lecture was printed in the November 2009 Newsletter.
- Twilight History Walk in Lower Norwood in March, led by Rev Mac Macdonald.
- At our Annual Meeting in May, Mr Trevor Schaefer presented historical aspects of Brougham Place Uniting Church, based on his book "The Light on the Hill".
- At Clayton-Wesley Church on Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> August a very interesting lecture and organ recital was presented by Dr Geoffrey Bishop and Dirk Zadra (organist) on William Robert Knox, who was an accomplished composer, organist and music master in Adelaide in late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> cent.
- Rev Allan George will give a lecture on his missionary experience in Papua New Guinea (New Ireland Province), 1963-69, at the History Centre in early October.

### **History Grants**

The Council was pleased to make grants to five groups totalling \$4,000, enabling the publication of historical books and assisting with significant anniversary celebrations of local congregations.

### **History Centre**

There are now ten volunteers assisting the work of sorting donations received from individuals and congregations; this includes valuable minute books and other historical material from closed congregations. Increasingly enquiries are received from individuals about past baptisms, marriages and burial records. In the past year several congregations have sought information on their past ministers as preparation for anniversaries. Work is continuing on databases which enhance the investigation of historical information.

### **Link with Synod Archivist**

The Synod Archivist works from the History Centre and is in regular contact with the Management Team.

### **FORWARD THINKING**

A programme of lectures and other events is being planned for 2011.

Concern has been expressed by individuals and some congregations about the inadvertent or unthinking destruction/disposal of historical material. Further planning will lead to development of tools to assist congregations in assessing the value of such material.

Encouragement to be given to congregations to become members of the Society.

Membership subscriptions including GST: one year \$15; 5 yrs \$60; life m/ship \$200; perpetual membership for congregations \$220.

Val Canty, President  
9 September 2010











