



Historical Society

of the Uniting Church
in South Australia

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"The Church on Wheels"
Methodist Home Mission Vehicle
C. 1940-1950

CONTENTS

Editorial	2
Mission Far and Wide: our Programme for 2011	3
In Adelaide 100 years ago Norah Norris	4
Research Project: Mission Themes in the post-war years	6
Recollections of "Home Mission in the 50's" Judy Eland	7
Growing Team of Volunteers	8
Notes and News	9

EDITORIAL

A friend recently shared with me her story of visiting the family home. Now retired and living in another region of Adelaide she was drawn to return again to the home and the community where she had grown up in the 1950s. The new owners of the home warmly invited her in when she knocked on the door and explained who she was and the reason for her visit.

In this age of mobility, change and instant communication we often think back and wonder about the way our lives were shaped by those places and communities that made us what we are. Many researchers report that Australians today regret the loss of community and a sense of belonging.

Our journeys into the past are sometimes tinged with nostalgia but the trips we take down memory lane are more than that. They are the times when we make discoveries about who we are and explain how we have arrived at where we are today.

The work of the UCA Historical Society is about collecting, documenting and interpreting the experiences of people in history, the congregations and movements of a people of faith who continue to move on to a promised land! But there is more to it than that.

By revisiting the past we gain new perspectives and insights about who we are today, what it means to belong and to be part of community. As with individuals, congregations have personalities and develop particular cultures and these are often expressed in routine practices and repertoires. These performative practices have formed the outlook and character of each community so that, although congregations have common practices, no one congregation is like another!

Ministers and new members in congregations will bring with them new insights and impetus for change but it is important to work with established traditions in developing new perspectives. We need to take the time to look and listen, enter into community life in a receptive way. By acknowledging the past it becomes possible to enhance and work with others in developing new directions based on existing foundations.

The secret of the future is often found in the past, not in its repetition year after year but in new expressions and practices that draw on the insights of the past while responding to the challenges of the present age.

(Rev Dr) Dean Eland

PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN THIS ISSUE

- Front cover. "The Church on Wheels". Original in UC History Centre Collection
Page 4. John Flynn, aged 31. Source: "John Flynn, Apostle to the Inland" by W. Scott McPheat. Hodder & Stoughton, 1963.
Page 5. Smith of Dunesk Mission, 1897. Source: "Robert Mitchell, Pioneer Missioner to the Inland". R.J. Scrimgeour, 1994.
Page 7. Personal collection, J. Eland.
Page 8. Uniting Church History Centre Collection. Photo: V. Canty

Mission Far and Wide: Programme Theme for 2011

In addition to their routine work, friends and volunteers of the UCA Historical Society will be undertaking research on different aspects of South Australian Mission history this year. This research will document the different perspectives and interpretations of the church at mission from the city centre, the growing metropolitan area and the rural and remote areas of the state.

One aspect of the church's mission is the contribution lay people make to community life and the North Terrace walk on March 27th will remind us of those South Australians who were both lay members and civic leaders. Their church membership and sense of Christian vocation are often over looked in the short biographies!

Mission history is about movements, crusades, evangelism and commitments to particular causes. This history includes the commitments denominations made to church growth and pioneering mission ventures. Some of these experiences had a geographical expression through overseas, home, city or outback mission church departments. In May we will hear more about the ministry of Rev Dr John Flynn in relation to the Smith of Dunesk Bequest and we look forward to celebrating 100 years of Frontier Services (founded as Australian Inland Mission). At the August 5th meeting of the Historical Society of SA Rev Dr Bill Edwards will be guest speaker on the topic, of the Moravian Church at Bethel. (www.hssa.org.au)

On July 10th and August 21st Pilgrim Church will be the venue for exploring issues about the witness of city congregations. The relationship between *first* churches and inner urban ministry will also be explored by Dean Eland in a session at the July 6th meeting of the SA Chapter of the Australian Association of Mission Studies. This meeting, held at Tabor College at 12.30pm, will focus on fifty years of Australian urban mission experience and its legacy to the church today.

The *home mission* article in this edition, based on the experience of soldier settlement families also illustrates the way churches in South Australian regional centres were the base for ministry which extended to the *remote* corners of the state!

In November we will be reporting on the post Second World War boom years and the impact of home mission policies and practices that were confronted by both population growth and significant change in social attitudes towards the church as an established institution! We have two volunteers working on this project and we would like to hear from readers who may like to share experiences and pass on documentation.

The Society would also like to hear from anyone interested in enrolling in the *How to do oral history* workshop at the State Library of SA. There are two dates for this year, Thursday 30 June and Thursday 10 November from 10am to approx 3pm. The UCA Historical Society collection is growing as churches pass on their records and printed material for safe keeping. While printed records are important, oral histories enhance our appreciation of personal experiences and provide insights into the past. Contact the editor for further information.

IN ADELAIDE 100 YEARS AGO

By Norah Norris

On Sunday January 23rd this year Scots Church, Adelaide, hosted a service to mark the centenary of the ordination of John Flynn. Guests included current patrol padres, Gregor Henderson chair of the John Flynn Foundation, Gray Birch, former national director of Frontier Services and Rosemary Young current director. Gregor preached on the John 12:32 text used by William Smith the minister who preached on 24th January 1911. Gregor challenged those present to learn from the courage and pioneer spirit of Flynn and to apply the same principles to embrace the challenge facing the church today. The following story prepared and presented by Norah Norris at the service provided a vivid background to the sequence of events 100 years ago. (Ed.)



Rev. John Flynn
(photographed in 1912 aged 31)

On Saturday morning 21st January 1911, John Flynn arrived at the Adelaide Railway Station on the train from Melbourne. Waiting to meet him at the station was the Rev Robert Mitchell, who over 15 years earlier had been the first Patrol Minister in the Smith of Dunesk Mission. The Mission was based at Beltana in the north of South Australia, where John Flynn was to begin his ministry. So John Flynn was warmly welcomed and taken to stay at the Mitchell's Manse at Goodwood.

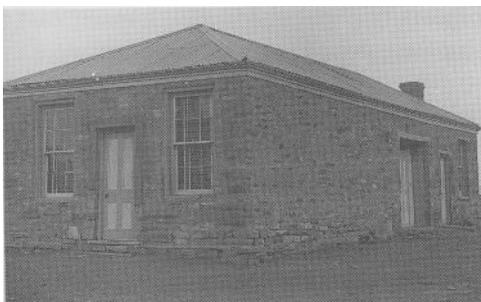
When a Presbyterian candidate for ordination completed his training, the next step was that he was 'Licensed to Preach the Gospel' and placed in an exit appointment. Then, usually several months later, a call would be issued and he would be ordained to the office of holy ministry and inducted into his parish. However, the Smith of Dunesk Mission Committee was anxious that their new appointee should go to Beltana in the Flinders Ranges and begin his ministry there **as an ordained minister** as soon as possible and so they requested the Presbytery of Belalie, which covered all the north of SA, to license and ordain him without delay. Because the mission's work was an outreach of the whole Presbyterian Church of SA, not just of the Presbytery of Belalie, the Presbytery of Adelaide was associated with Belalie for the occasion. Consequently the ministers and elders who made up the presbyteries travelled from scattered northern parishes and from all over the Adelaide region, and at 2.30 in the afternoon of Tuesday 24th January 1911 John Flynn met with them in the church in Flinders Street, Adelaide to undergo his Trials for Licence.

The fathers and brethren interviewed the candidate and received reports on the work that he had submitted to them. New Testament Greek was always a difficulty for John Flynn in College, but the Rev Dr George Davidson, the minister of the Flinders Street church, had read his Greek Critical Exercise and reported that it was worthy to be sustained. The Rev Thomas Shanks of Port Adelaide reported favourably on Flynn's ordination thesis. The Rev Thomas Charlton, Moderator of the Presbytery of Belalie, spoke highly of a sermon he had examined and the Rev Robert Mitchell commended his conduct of worship and preaching. The minutes of this meeting go on to record that "having heard all the reports, opportunity was given to any member to express his opinion. This led to some interesting expression of thoughts." (But we are not told what those interesting thoughts were!) It was noted that there were no objections to John Flynn's life or doctrine. His Confirmation Certificate, the Certificate from the College Committee indicating his satisfactory completion of theological training and a certificate from the Presbytery

of Melbourne North, which had overseen his training, were all found to be in order. It was finally moved that the Trials for Licence be sustained, that they be accepted in lieu of any further trials for ordination and that the presbytery proceed to ordain Mr Flynn.

At 7.30pm that evening, the ministers and elders of the two presbyteries and a number of church members from the city and suburban Presbyterian churches assembled in the Flinders Street church. The service was conducted by the Rev Thomas Charlton, moderator of the Presbytery of Belalie, with the Rev Dr George Davidson, the Flinders Street minister also taking part. The Flinders Street Church Choir sang.

The preacher was the Rev William Gray, a keen supporter of the Smith of Dunesk Mission, who had been Clerk of the Assembly and at that time was Financial Secretary and General Agent of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia. He was one of the first locally born and trained Presbyterian ministers in SA, and had spent 13



*Smith of Dunesk Mission Church 1897.
(R. Mitchell)*

years as a missionary in the New Hebrides as well as having a distinguished career as a parish minister and administrator. Years later, at the age of 71 and after the death of his wife, William Gray himself was to go north to Beltana where he served as a patrol padre for nearly five years. The church magazine, the Presbyterian Banner, reported that the Ordination Sermon preached by Mr Gray on 24th January 1911 was "an able and impressive sermon" but doesn't give any detail.

Inland pioneer, the Rev Robert Mitchell, on behalf of the Smith of Dunesk Mission Committee, narrated the steps that had led to the new appointment. The usual questions prescribed by the church were answered satisfactorily by the ordinand. And so, with the laying on of hands and prayer, John Flynn was ordained to the holy ministry and designated as Agent for the Smith of Dunesk Mission. The Presbytery Clerk, the Rev James Patterson from Port Pine, gave the charge to the newly ordained minister. While he and all present no doubt looked forward to a good outcome from this new ministry, they could have had no idea of all that was to come as a result of their actions that night one hundred years ago.

John Flynn was staying with the Mitchell family in their manse at Goodwood and spent a few more days there, while Robert Mitchell and the Rev E E Baldwin, the previous patrol minister, talked to him about their experiences in the ministry to which he was going. As he heard about their concern for the physical and social as well as spiritual wellbeing of the isolated people of the north, it would have fitted very well with Flynn's own ideas.

There was a heatwave in Adelaide that week, so hot that in the law courts the barristers were excused from wearing wigs and gowns. But the Mitchell home has been described as a large rambling house surrounded by grape vines and fruit trees - so maybe it wasn't too hot. Flynn would have been told about the heat and dust at Beltana. I wonder if they told him that the manse was in a very bad state due to white ants and general decay.

The famous purpose-built buggy was showing signs of wear and tear after 15 years of

Contd. Next page

Research Project : Mission Themes in the Post War Years

In 2011 a volunteer research team is undertaking a study of the SA church at Mission in the post WW 2 years. This project will involve a number of people who were responsible for developing mission responses and were committed to pioneering forms of ministry.

The term, *Mission*, evokes different perspectives and interpretations and this study will focus on home mission policies and practices, particularly in establishing new congregations in Adelaide's growing suburban community from the 1950s. The population of suburban Adelaide almost doubled as families settled into new homes. In 1947 the population was just under 650,000 and by 1966 it was over 1 million, an increase of 450,000 in nearly 20 years.

The denominational church was also committed to overseas mission, Aboriginal missions, central missions and industrial mission. In addition, there were those major occasions when Alan Walker and Billy Graham came to Adelaide with their version of evangelical or revival missions. The first and second National Christian Youth Conventions also had an impact on the life of the church and there were several controversial episodes and contentious theological debates!

The sixties were a watershed time for the church as conventional patterns of church life declined and new ideas and experimental forms of ministry emerged. Now fifty years later, is there anything to learn from these fresh expressions of mission as we faces the challenge of today?

The project will set out to document the response of the denominations to this challenge and invite reflection on the lessons learnt. Personal stories, photographs and documentation from this era will be an important ingredient to this work. We have many members in our churches willing to share their experience and reflect on the policies and practices of our three former denominations.

The first stage of this project will involve determining goals and identifying existing sources and include basic dates and personalities, movements, churches and policies that shaped the era.

Dean Eland, project coordinator, would like to hear from those that have experiences to share and are able to provide documentation and comments. djeland@bigpond.com Phone 8172 2133 mobile 0419 112 603

From previous page

rough tracks; the harness needed to be replaced as it was no longer safe and one of the two horses was reaching the end of its useful life. Actually at that time the Smith of Dunesk Committee was (I quote) "considering the advisability of experimenting with a motor buggy, should finances prove sufficient." Sadly, finances were not sufficient and it was to be many years before they obtained the first motor car for Beltana.

On Wednesday 1st February the Rev John Flynn, accompanied by Mr Baldwin, boarded the train bound for Beltana and Flynn of the Inland began his new ministry.

RECOLLECTIONS OF “HOME MISSION” IN THE 50’S

In March 1950, my family moved to the South East onto a block as part of the ‘Pleasant Park’ soldier settlement scheme. There were nine families in all, mostly with young children. The farms were very isolated with no power, phone, school or any kind of community centre. The nearest shops and services were in Mt Gambier, 28 kilometres away over unmade roads. In winter the road was just a track alongside swamps and gum trees and we were often bogged. In summer the track turned to sand and it sometimes took two hours to reach Mt Gambier.

My parents, Bob and Dora Beck, who had been active members of the Methodist church in Magill, made contact with Wesley Church in Mt Gambier where they met a number of lay members who suggested that the Home Mission Department could support monthly services on the settlement. It seemed somewhat of a miracle when Methodist Home Mission sent out a young minister (Rev Os Edwards was the first) along with an organist, folding portable organ and a suitcase of hymn books.

The initial service was held in our home, followed by lunch for all and later other families also took turns. My mother recalls preparing pasties, sponges and pavlovas in the wood stove in the hope of more fellowship after the service. I remember the excitement of dressing in best clothes, and the anticipation of the ‘children’s address’, as we sometimes went weeks without contact with other families. The feelings of isolation which drew us together made people who would never have attended a service in normal circumstances, come along for moral support.

In April 1951, Rev. Gowan Armstrong was the probationer Methodist minister stationed at Mt Gambier, and allocated the task of conducting our monthly services. In May he broke his leg while playing football and arrived on crutches [as shown on right]. Recently, Gowan told me how he was reprimanded by the Adelaide Office who said he had been sent to preach the gospel, not play football! Sometimes in winter it was too wet to get through and once I recall the men having to go down the road and pull his van out of a bog before the service.



Representatives of three families and the visiting minister, Rev Gowan Armstrong, on the front steps of the Beck home, Lynwood Park, Mothers Day, 13th May, 1951.

In the meantime my father with other parents had been pressuring the Education Department to provide us with a school. In January 1952, a portable class room was erected on the road between the Settlement and Livingstone’s Timber Mill, opening in February with 19 children and a teacher who had to board with each family for three months! From then, the monthly services with a Sunday school in the lunch shed, were held in the school building, sometimes staying for a shared meal and sport such as basketball in the afternoon. Gowan recalled in his diary his final service with us (and his first after ordination) in March 1952 with a congregation of thirty, “God blessed us all in every part of the worship”.

These services in the classroom continued until the school closed in 1959. By then an all-weather road into Mt Gambier had been built and the settlement families were making connections with a wider community. My family joined the Wesley Church which had provided the organists and moral support for our remote congregation during those nine years.

Judy Eland

Growing Team of Volunteers



On Wednesday afternoon from 1.00 to 4.00 pm the Society's History Centre at 44a East Ave Black Forest has become a busy and often a crowded place. Over the past year the volunteer team has expanded and now an average of 10 volunteers are at work, cataloguing and securing the growing collection of documents and memorabilia. Val and Gaye are co-managers of the History Centre.

Val at the back desk helps direct the traffic, answers the phone and responds to enquiries which come via email. The Society is able to assist those looking for information about families that migrated to South Australia and while there are some limitations we are often able to direct enquirers to other sources.

Gaye at the front desk welcomes those who call in asking for advice and with Val allocates work to volunteers.

As the society's secretary Jonathan is involved in the day to day management of the Society and in organising the annual program.

The Synod archivist, Jim, is responsible for receiving and sorting all documentation from churches. He has recently negotiated a new agreement with the State Library to ensure that minute books and registers are well secure and safely stored for future generations.

There are a number of ongoing projects that involve data bases for ready reference to information about congregations, ministers, lay leaders and the many church organisations and movements.

For two years Judith has been working on editing an index of ministers and lay people taken from Methodist newspapers from the 1880s. Judith is up to 1943 and references include date, page and source so that a ready access is possible to obituaries and other articles.

Several years ago Colin Watson began a database on Methodist ministers. Elizabeth continues to add information from conference minutes, scrapbooks and other diverse sources. Michael is reading through the extensive copies of the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, *South Australian Methodist* and *New Times*, indexing items about local churches. This will assist the Centre when queries come about church foundations, anniversaries, etc.

Judy is sorting and filing the growing number of documents in a hard copy filing system that includes individual congregations in SA from the three former denominations and the Uniting Church. Jan is helping to name, date and file photos from personal and family donations as well as the *New Times* collection.

Glenys is working on the Way College collection. Way College (now Annesley College) was the Bible Christian training institution up to Methodist Union in 1900 and included theological, agricultural and general students. Built as an eye hospital in 1881 the building became Way College in 1892 and closed in May 1903, following the union of Methodist churches. It was reopened in January 1904 as the

Methodist Ladies College. The theological college moved to Brighton, to the home of the Principal, Dr W G Torr, known as 'Old Oxford'. The project will ensure that the documents and history of Way College and its successors are accessible and secure.

David H sorts the boxes and donations of items that are delivered to the centre. Items are added to sections of the centre including a growing library, photo collection and display area. David G, the handyman, fixes cupboards, hangs the growing collection of banners, pictures and portraits and ensures that the property is maintained.

Colin and Dean are working on a research project on concepts and practices of *Mission* in SA in the post WW2 years.

Others that call in from time to time have other tasks and as the collection grows the management team is planning ahead to ensure that display and meeting space is adequate for the long term. We have room for more volunteers and would like to hear from you. As the work of the centre becomes known and enquiries increase, we are now giving consideration opening on another day of the week. Phone 8297 8472 or e mail to ucahist@chariot.net.au

The web site is <http://www.historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au/>

NOTES AND NEWS

The **Spicer Cottages Trust** celebrated the gift of Mabel Michell (1903-2000) at Athelstone on January 16th. Mabel was a member of the Maylands church for many years and her legacy to the Uniting Church provides low cost accommodation for the families of ministers.

This year **Rosefield Church** will be celebrating 100 years of worship and service. E mail admin@rosefield.org.au or phone 8271 9528 for further information.

Yeelanna UC, centrally located on Lower Eyre Peninsula is also celebrating 100 years at a centenary service on March 20th. Enquiries to David Pearson 8676 8071.

The annual gathering of **retired ministers** will be held at Nunyara on Tuesday March 15th.

The UCA Historical Society is continuing the annual **grants program** in 2011. Deadline for applications is March 31st and, as in past years, grants will average \$500. Grants are available to meet the cost of anniversary celebrations, associated publications and telling the story of congregations and organisations. E mail ucahist@chariot.net.au or phone the centre on Wednesday afternoon at 8297 8472 for further details.

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From previous page

The Urban Mission Network is organising a morning workshop on April 2nd for churches included on the SA Register of Heritage buildings. The program will begin at 10.00 and conclude with lunch at 12.30. The workshop will be held at Clayton Wesley, Portrush Rd, Beulah Park, with on-site parking. Contact Christine Secombe the Coordinator of the UMN at phone 8332 8339 or e mail connect2me@urbannetwork.org.au for further information. Web site of the Urban Mission network is www.urbannetwork.org.au

HISTORY PLAYS A PART....

Fifteen congregations in Adelaide's western suburbs have been involved in an Action-Research Project sponsored by the Mission Resourcing Network of the Presbytery and the Community Outreach and Urban Mission Networks. Reports from each congregation include a 'background' section that highlights the significant changes and adaptations of these congregations over many years. The origins and ethos of each congregation are explored in the report with the 'first' congregation, Port Adelaide, being formed in 1849 and the most recent being West Lakes United.

The report will be shared with leaders of these congregations on April 12th. A morning session will be held at Western Link (Findon) from 10.00 to 12.30 pm. A repeated session will be held at Semaphore UC beginning at 7.00 pm. Visitors are welcome to attend these sessions. For further information, contact Dean Eland (djeland@bigpond.com) Dean is the project coordinator.

A two day retreat and workshop in **Cornish Prayer and Spirituality** will be held at Moonta Mines Church on Monday the 9th and Tuesday 10th May. The retreat is part of the Kernewek Lowender from May 8-15th at Moonta, Kadina and Wallaroo. E mail robron@pryor.org.au or phone Robin Pryor at 03 5988 5257 for further information.

Members are invited to contact the UCA History Centre to indicate their interest in attending the State Library's **Oral History workshop** on Thursday June 30th from 10.00am to 3.00pm. As part of the workshop, participants will be introduced to the library's recording equipment. Three copies of conversations are produced, one for the Society, one for the participants and one is kept for the State Library.

Next edition of the Newsletter. We are planning to include items of historical interest and news of church anniversaries in our regular editions of the Newsletter. Send your items to the editor Dean Eland C/of the UCA History Centre 44A East Ave Black Forest SA 5035 or e mail to djeland@bigpond.com

Churches and Individuals are invited to become members of the Society. Contact the Office on Wednesday for further information. Membership subscriptions assist in developing the work of the Society.