


THE UNITING CHURCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: Dr. Arnold Hunt
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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that if their subscriptions run out at the end of 1988 they should now be renewed. The amount is very modest - \$6 for one year and \$10 for two. Please send subscriptions to the Treasurer, Rev. George Wright, 26 Kyeema Avenue, Cumberland Park. 5041.

IF THERE IS A CROSS BESIDE YOUR NAME ON THE ENVELOPE IT MEANS THAT YOU ARE IN ARREARS.

ROWE MEMORIAL LECTURE

The address given by Professor Norman Young on 30 May on WESLEY CONSCIENCE AND WAR has now been published. It is available from Epworth Books, 33 Pirie Street, Adelaide at a cost of \$1 (postage 60 cents). It can also be ordered from the editor.

LIFE OF THE REV. JAMES ASHTON

by T. Ronald Hayward

The new Church building which was opened at Stirling East on 28th April 1878 was named the 'Ashton Memorial Church'.

James Ashton was a former Minister of the Mt. Lofty Bible Christian Circuit, in which the Stirling Church was located. He served from 1867 to 1870. He was a much loved Minister and was rightly held to have been largely responsible for the increase in the Church in the Stirling area which took place during the years of his ministry and continued into the ensuing years.

BIRTH

James Ashton was the fifth son and sixth child of William and Mary Ashton. He was born at Beaford, Devon, on the 20th January, 1819. He was a shy child and was very fond of his mother. When he was about 9 or 10 years old he had to leave school to assist in the cultivation of his father's garden. Though without any thorough religious instruction, he had serious thoughts of death and used to wish to be prepared to die. When his father was not at the inn on Sunday afternoons, he would usually examine his children in the church catechism at home. Occasionally this was done by the clergyman at the church.

DEATH AND ITS IMPRESSIONS

James narrowly escaped being killed as a boy by going out in front of the wheels of a waggon while it was going down hill. He hung on to the shaft to save himself until the horses slackened speed. When he was about twelve he visited his mother's relatives at Hartland, where the Bible Christian Ministers preached in his uncle's house. In letters left by him, describing his early life, he says 'At this time I recollect I liked everything very well, except the groaning. I had the impression that they, my uncle, aunt and cousins, were in the way to heaven, and the conviction deepened that I was not in that way. Soon after this I went to Hartland to reside in the house of my uncle... I said on leaving home, to my sister, I hope I shall now lead a better life, as I shall be with religious folks. My father's charge to me on leaving was I was not to be a Methodist... When in my 15th year my eldest brother, a man of more than 24 years, died of brain fever, an event that deeply affected me. Three months later, the September of the same year, 1833, my dear and loving mother died... Four months after, my dear and only sister about 20 years of age, died. These flobds of trouble bore me to a region of deep solitude and of great distress and alarm. I felt I was not fit to live, and I was sure I was not fit to die.'

CONVERSION

After much serious thought and meditation he finally 'bowed openly before the Lord as a penitent', and was converted. He became a teacher in a Bible Christian school and often said he was sorry he had not joined the church sooner. He became the third teetotaler in his town. He came to know some young local preachers of the Wesleyan Association at Boyton, and association with them led him into preaching. Preachers were scarce and in 1841, he offered to the Conference as a candidate and was accepted as a probationer. He was appointed to the Falmouth Circuit for one year, and then to the Tenterden Circuit for one year. While at Falmouth there was a revival, hundreds were converted and in one week he received 30 people into membership of the church. After two years at Tenterden he was appointed to Brentor in Devon, and while there he farewelled his two younger brothers, who emigrated to Canada.

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CIRCUITS

He was received into full connexion as a minister at the Conference of 1845, and was appointed to St. Columb in Cornwall. The following year saw him at Scilly, but he returned to St. Columb by request and remained there until July, 1848. In September, 1848, he married Elizabeth Gibson of St. Marys, Scilly, and was appointed to Elham in Kent for one year, and then moved to Faversham. A year at Brighton was followed by three years in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, and the last two years Mr. and Mrs. Ashton spent in England were at Newport in Monmouthshire. In 1856 he was requested by the Missionary Committee of the Bible Christian Conference to go to Prince Edward Island, in Canada, but a Mr. Cephas Barker, who had gone there on deputation, arranged to stay for 5 years, so this request was not fulfilled.

CALL TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA

At the conference of 1857, news was received of the serious illness of the Rev. James Way in South Australia, and an urgent request was made that James Ashton should go to South Australia. He consented, and he and his wife embarked on the ship the 'Chancellor', arriving in Melbourne on the 31st January, 1858, and at Pt. Adelaide on the 5th February.

The first three years in this State were spent in the Willunga Circuit, which included Yankalilla and Pt. Elliot. He worked hard, frequently being away from home 3 weeks out of 4. His next pastorate was at Clarendon. He was ill when he went there, the death of a colleague, George Gill, affected him greatly, and he was not able to work full-time for a period. In 1864 he was moved to Bowden, then part of the Adelaide Circuit, where he stayed 3 years, taking a leading part in the Jubilee meetings of the Bible Christian Church in 1865.

He went to the Mt. Lofty Circuit in 1867 and remained there 4 years, evidently making an indelible impression on the people of that Circuit.

SICKNESS AND DEATH

He was appointed to Gawler in 1871 and became Chairman of the District and also Connexional Book Steward. His health deteriorated, and by 1874 he was severely hampered by illness. However, even while suffering from congestion of a lung, he preached 3 times a Sunday. In November 1874 he brought his wife and two daughters, Janie and Leila Kate, to stay with his eldest daughter, Mrs. Mary Hunter, at Bridgewater. He was taken ill there, and died on Monday, 14th December, 1874 at 55, having been a minister for over 33 years. He left his widow and eight children.

HIS MEMORIAL

It was very soon after Ashton's death that the people of the Bible Christian Church at Stirling, optimistic over their increased numbers, began to think about a new, larger chapel. His death at such a time certainly influenced the suggestion that the new building should be named 'Ashton Memorial' and stimulated the urge to build a 'worthy structure'.

The old chapel was not overflowing with people, but it was a rather poor structure and the people considered, probably quite rightly, that the building of a new one would be a step in the right direction for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. To associate the name of James Ashton with the new building was also an idea which spurred people on to give of their time, their efforts and their money.

THE WEST MITCHAM METHODIST CHURCH 1950-1970

Glenelle Crowe

(The following article is from an essay written by Mrs. Glenelle Crowe for the Australian Religious History course at Flinders University. We are grateful to Mrs. Crowe for permission to use this. The essay has been abridged. Ed.)

This study covers the West Mitcham Methodist Church over a twenty year period from 1950 until 1970, an era which saw vigorous growth especially in the area of Sunday School and youth work. According to Dr. John Bodycomb, this growth was evident throughout not only the Methodist denomination, but across all denominations. However, in the district in which the West Mitcham Methodist Church was located, rapid development was occurring, with the vacant land being taken up for housing and an influx of families with young children moving into the district. This factor is significant in understanding the ethos of the church during the period under review.

EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

Whilst the Methodist Church at the national level promoted two major evangelistic campaigns, the Crusade for Christ in 1948, and the Mission to the Nation in 1953, West Mitcham appears not to have been involved in either of these. Conversations with church members of that era reveal that although a few people remember attending rallies where the Rev. Alan Walker preached, there is no memory or record of the campaigns having any impact on the church as a whole. In fact, the evidence suggests that the church was somewhat inward-looking and very largely concerned with meeting the ever increasing demand for accommodation for the steadily growing Sunday School, and efforts to attract, provide for, and maintain the interest of the teenage population whose needs and interests were beginning to demand special recognition and appropriate programs. Hence the major preoccupation of the church's leadership during the twenty years in question was the provision of more buildings and allied to that, the necessity to raise the necessary funds to do so.

A little more interest was elicited in the 1959 Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusade where several people from the church enrolled in the counsellor training sessions and professed to having had their faith revitalised. Many of the choir members sang in the spectacular Crusade choir consisting of several hundred voices. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Billy Graham Crusade, any more than the Mission to the Nation caused the church to embark on any particular program of outreach, or significantly attracted those on the fringe or outside of the church to become involved with the West Mitcham Methodist Church.

PLANS

Since 1948, plans had been mooted for the building of a Soldiers' Memorial Hall in remembrance of those who gave their lives in the two World Wars. The initiative for this came from the Women's Guild which raised £142 at their annual fete in that year and deposited the money in a Savings Bank Account opened for that purpose, adding to it yearly the proceeds of subsequent fetes. These annual fetes were the highlight of the year's work of the Women's Guild. With the accommodation problem becoming serious in the early 1950's, the church Trust took up the cause of the new hall, although it was the provision of recreational facilities that were at first given highest priority.

In March, 1952, a circular letter from the Secretary of the Trust was sent to all parents and friends who were in any way connected with the church, drawing attention to the rapidly increasing attendances in the Sunday School and at Sunday morning and evening services, and 'signs of a quickening interest and enthusiasm generally.' The letter went on to express the concern of the Trust to provide facilities for approximately forty young people aged between 13 and 18 years who were associated with the church.

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THE WEST MITCHAM METHODIST CHURCH 1950-1970 Contd.

A triangular area of land bounded by the West Mitcham Methodist Cemetery, the railway line, and Belair Road, had been loaned to the church as a playing area. Hence it was reported at the subsequent meeting held on 25th March, 1952, that steps had been taken to put down tennis courts ('working bees' were held on Saturdays by the men of the church for this purpose), and a Young People's Club was to be formed to provide activities such as table-tennis and darts. In order to finance these activities it was decided that there should be an envelope appeal to all parents and friends and the Women's Guild was asked to help with the fund raising.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

At the same time problems were being experienced with the increasing Sunday School enrolments. The kindergarten department was desperately short of chairs and parents and friends were invited to donate chairs at a cost of 15 shillings each or at least to make a contribution towards the cost of one chair.

A spirit of enthusiasm and optimism was very evident during this period. A church newsletter dated 14th May, 1952, reports that Mr. Norman Makin, who was for a short time 'acting minister' of the Mitcham end of the Malvern circuit, was giving enthusiastic leadership, and that there was a rapid growth in youth organisations. 'Basketball teams are doing well; Sunday School attendance is increasing. Altogether our Church is beginning to live.'

There were 151 scholars on the Sunday School roll for which the existing accommodation was totally inadequate. Ten classes of the 'big' school were housed in the church; the kindergarten met in the 'small' hall (the original church building) which necessitated having to double 'the circle' and the situation was even worse in summer, and the primary department met in the kitchen which was already crowded.

In January 1954 a loan was sought from the Methodist Home Mission Church Extension Fund and £4,000 was received from that body, the Thanksgiving Memorial Crusade Fund gave a gift of £500; the Methodist Church Loan Fund gave a £300 interest free loan, and £1,570 had accumulated in the Soldiers Memorial Hall Fund. A strip of land 10 feet wide was purchased from the church's southern neighbour for £75, a building committee set up and a tender of £6,315 accepted for the construction of the hall which was officially opened on 14th July 1956. Severe damage to the church building caused by an earthquake in early 1954 necessitated further appeals for funds and a special Earthquake Damage Fund was established which succeeded in raising over £500 by July 1954.

GROWTH

During these years the church was experiencing spontaneous and vigorous growth. New organisations were being formed to find a niche for everyone. Special services were held frequently throughout the year. Palm Sunday, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, Church and Sunday School Anniversaries, and Christmas services saw special contributions by the choir. Thanksgiving Sunday and Church Anniversaries featured a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon with musical items by the choir and visiting soloists and guest speakers. Sunday School Anniversaries of the time are remembered with much nostalgia. A specially erected tiered platform at the front of the church was crowded with children and young people, whilst the congregation spilled out of the church and into the Memorial Hall next door. For many, the church catered not only for their spiritual needs but for the social and recreational needs as well.

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THE WEST MITCHAM METHODIST CHURCH 1950-1970 Contd.

SOCIAL ISSUES

There is no evidence to suggest that the West Mitcham church as a body took any more than a passing interest in the social issues of the day. When it was suggested that instead of the annual deputation from the Temperance Alliance, a donation should be sent to that body, a minority view was expressed that 'with regard to the evil of alcoholic liquor, instead of cancelling the visit we should invite them to be with us more often.' However the majority view prevailed and a donation was forwarded to the Alliance. The proposed introduction of T.A.B. off-course betting into South Australia provoked a letter from the Trust to Mr. Robin Millhouse, M.P. for Mitcham, in which great concern was expressed at the proposed legislation:-

We consider gambling a social evil and consider it contrary to the best interests of the people of South Australia ... The temptation to wager is increased and the amount of money dissipated through gambling is increased, to the detriment of our established social system. T.A.B. facilities will invite young people to gamble ...

STEWARDSHIP

By 1962 Sunday School accommodation was again proving to be a problem and in March of that year a letter from the Sunday School was sent to the Trust requesting that additional accommodation for the Sunday School be placed high on the priority list of church property requirements. This pressing need for still more buildings reintroduced a subject that had been raised as early as 1960 and which proved to be a source of major contention in the church, the issue of Stewardship. Early in 1960, efforts had been made to encourage church members and adherents to give more generously to the work of the church. A pastoral letter had gone out seeking prayerful reconsideration of members' giving, setting out details of the church's financial commitments, and inviting people to use the envelope system of giving. The response was poor, however, with only six people requesting envelopes.

After much dissention it was decided in April 1963, that a Stewardship program should be initiated and that the Department of Stewardship be engaged to direct it. The decision however, was by no means unanimous and provoked strong feeling, so much so that the Secretary of the Trust tendered his resignation and another Trust member, after lobbying those Trustees who had not been present at the meeting as well as some who had, wrote a strongly worded letter to the Trust stating that he had statements and names to show that the decision to hold such a campaign had not in fact been a majority decision. The letter was duly noted at the meeting of 8th July, 1963.

Notwithstanding, an agreement was entered into with the Stewardship Department for a three year Campaign which resulted in 127 families pledging to give a total of £10,520. With an assured income, plans proceeded for the redevelopment of the back of the Church requiring the demolition of the original church building and an old kitchen. The new building was officially opened on the 17th January, 1965.

CHURCH INTERIOR

At the same time, another issue which also proved to be highly contentious was that of a change to the interior of the church. The idea of a change was first raised in early 1960 when the gift of a Communion rail was made available by the Rosefield Methodist Church, and was consistent with a general trend throughout Methodism where traditionally a central pulpit had been flanked on either side by the choir. But more recent thinking saw a change of emphasis in which the sanctuary area received the central focus. However, suggested changes initially received a cautious response.

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THE WEST MITCHAM METHODIST CHURCH 1950-1970 Contd.

The final outcome after much discussion was that a special Trust meeting was called in November 1965, when it was decided that the choir would be placed at the southern side front of the church, but at a lower level of the sanctuary, which would be carpeted and further enhanced by suitable lighting. The work was not carried out until April, 1967, seven years after it was first proposed.

MEMBERSHIP

Regrettably, Members Rolls are not available for the period under review. Nor are Leaders Meeting Minute books. However, some information has been gleaned from the *Church History*, Sunday School Teachers Meeting Minute books, and Trust records. According to the *Church History*, Church membership during the ministry of the Rev. W.R. Steadman, 1953-1959 increased from 96 to 168. As has previously been stated, the Mitcham district was a rapidly growing area and many additions to the roll were transfers from other churches. By 1965 total church membership had risen to 232, and a 'newly pruned' review of the roll in 1968 put the total at 259. This figure appears to have remained fairly constant until the early 1980's when a significant decline in numbers was noted. Sunday School enrolments also appear to have peaked in the mid 1960's and remained constant until the early 1970's when a notable decrease occurred. It would appear that this may be largely attributed to demographic forces in that the population of the district was maturing, families with young children no longer formed the majority of the population, and younger folk were marrying and moving out of the district.

Thus the twenty year period from between 1950 and 1970 were years when the West Mitcham Church experienced its most vigorous growth. A rapid influx of families into the area and enthusiastic and dedicated leadership within the church provided an active, lively environment in which many of the secular needs of the community were catered for as well as the provision for the religious and spiritual needs of the area.

BURTON LIVES AGAIN

Bill Harris

Sunday 16th October saw nearly 200 people gather at the Burton Cemetery on Bolivar Road, Salisbury. Former residents and their families came together with new residents for a 'Back To Burton' celebration. Music for the service to mark the occasion was provided by the ninety year old reed organ from the old Methodist church. The instrument was salvaged by Doug. Wright of Salisbury and carefully restored for the occasion.

The Burton Chapel was one of a number spread along the Gawler Plains in the latter part of the 19th century. Opened in 1858 it was a typical Primitive Methodist Chapel and also served as the local school. Many well known families on the Gawler Plains were connected with this church, among them being those of Diment, White, Quick, Wright, Goodier, Gilberton, Magor, Beer and Helps.

William Diment of 'Beaford Farm' was one of the most prominent Methodist laymen on the Gawler Plains, being a local preacher, circuit steward, and conference delegate prior to his election to the presidential chair of the Primitive Methodist Church in 1883.

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BURTON LIVES AGAIN Contd.

Descendants of these pioneer families are active in the Uniting Church today. Geoff. Diment is an exit student from Parkin Wesley College; Robert Wright is the Synod staff person responsible for camps and conference centres, and Rev. John Magor, minister at Yankalilla, was the preacher for the service.

Whilst the original church buildings fell into disuse in 1950 and deteriorated through vandalism until they were finally demolished in 1972, the site is now surrounded by new residential developments.

It is anticipated that 50,000 people will be resident in Salisbury West by the early 1990's. The Paralowie congregation of the Salisbury Parish represents the renewal of church activities in the area. House worship commenced in the new manse in Camelot Drive in 1984 and by 1985 the group had grown large enough to move to the Children's Centre in Yalumba Drive where it still meets.

With Salisbury West now recognised as a major growth area, these new 'pioneers' are now seeking to establish a permanent Uniting Church ministry to the area. Their joining together with the pioneers of the past in the 'Back To Burton' celebrations recognised the achievements of the past and proclaimed their faith in the future of the church in this area.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

The Society wishes to receive publications from local churches and parishes, especially those issued in connection with jubilees, centenaries and other occasions of interest. The following are recent additions to the Society's stock.

EMMANUEL, the story of Laura Uniting Church was prepared for the centenary earlier this year. The opening up of the northern areas for agricultural settlement in the 1870s saw the entry of the three Methodist churches into the region. The Wesleyans built the first church in the town of Laura in 1873. A year later the Primitive Methodists also erected a building. The Bible Christians entered Gladstone and Wirrabara, south and north respectively of Laura. This publication of 48 pages is a worthy record, with material from the past together with a description of the present activities of the church.

A CAVALCADE OF HISTORIC CHURCH SITES was prepared for a visit to seven church sites north of Port Germein. About 80 people took part in the 'cavalcade' on 28 August. Port Germein and the area along the road to Port Augusta was largely Bible Christian territory. As late as 1927, however, the Methodist church began work on the aboriginal reserve a few miles from Port Germein. Some interesting old Plans from the Port Germein circuit are reproduced in this publication, a well-prepared account of several churches that now belong to history. Services are still held at Port Germein, the church now being part of the Port Pirie parish.

SUNSET ROCK church at Mount Lofty was opened on 30 August. The order of service was accompanied by accounts of the three churches which were closed and sold in order to make possible the merger of three congregations in the new building. They were Ashton Memorial (opened as a Bible Christian church in 1878), Mount Lofty Congregational (dating from 1882) and Aldgate Methodist (originally Wesleyan, built in 1884).

WESLEY CHURCH, BROKEN HILL, now in the N.S.W. Synod, was for a century within the South Australia Conference of the Methodist church. The present church was built in 1888 and the centenary booklet gives a brief history of the building. Methodist work had begun two years earlier as an outreach from nearby Silverton.