


THE UNITING CHURCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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GORDON ROWE MEMORIAL LECTURE

The Rev Gordon Rowe was one of the founders in 1950 of the Methodist Historical Society. Through the generosity of his family a lecture is given every three or four years in his memory.

The next Rowe Lecture will be given at Blackwood on Friday 11 November at 8 pm. Mr. Rob Linn, a well-known local historian, will explore the links between Christian faith and social concern in the lives of a number of notable churchmen in early South Australian history. A number of institutions eg. the Children's Hospital owed much to the inspiration of leading Protestants.

PLACE: Uniting Church Coffee Lounge, Main Road, Blackwood
DATE: 11 November at 8 p.m.
SPEAKER: Rob Linn
SUBJECT: Protestant Philanthropy

CLOSING OF HISTORIC CHURCH AT CALLINGTON

Richard Mills

The history of mining and of the Methodist churches in the Mount Barker Special Mineral Survey was already four years old when, in the course of surveying a new town on a new route from Balhannah to Wellington, the surface of a new lode was exposed by the passage of a dray wheel. The year was 1849, the Colony then being only 12 years of age. The Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyans were immediately on the spot to minister to the flood of miners. The first Wesleyan building dated from 1851 and there is a reference to an early school run by the Primitive Methodists. At the rear of the present building is the ruin of a small stone structure which is thought to be the first church and school.

A few years later the Wesleyans had a new building on the highest point in the main street, Montefiore Street and in 1862 the present Uniting Church building was constructed.

EARLY SERVICES

Both of these buildings were crowded up to three times per Sunday, chiefly with Cornish miners and a few farmers and pastoralists. Callington was unique in that from the beginning it also had a population of German miners and farmers and soon afterwards, a similar group of Irish miners. Both of these national groups had churches in the area, and while the Lutheran church of 1864 was under construction, the congregation was permitted the use of the new Primitive Methodist church.

REVIVAL

In 1865 the Christian cause at Callington received a great blessing; the *Primitive Methodist Record* reported that 'Callington has been favoured with a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God. Many precious souls have found salvation through faith in Christ and in the Wesleyan church (chiefly in the latter) the saving power of God has been marvellously displayed, the voice of praise and prayer is now heard in every part of the township, and, thank God, the good work is going on, we trust it will never stop until the whole place has become thoroughly evangelized. O! for a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost upon ministers, local preachers, leaders, sunday school teachers and members. We have upon the whole station signs of abundance of rain in full congregations, heart searching sermons, fervent prayers, marked attention, and deep emotion under the preaching of God's word. We are looking for the mighty shower nor shall we look in vain.'

Another reference speaks of healed and restored relationships amongst townspeople and at the Wesleyan church the classes were increased from four to five with a corresponding rise in giving.

Callington at this time was home to names such as Wellington, Wiltshire and others which were later outstanding in the early Methodist cause in South Australia.

PEAK ATTENDANCE

As to numbers in attendance at the two churches in Callington, a peak was reached about the time of the revival. At the end of the sixties there was a departure of miners to Moonta when the company managing Callington's Bremer Mine failed, however, another company took over and gave the mine another three years of life. After this there was only a gradual decline in attendance as many miners were happy to be farmers as well and to go on 'tributing' for many years in the numerous other mines of the district. For the Bremer mine however, with its expensive Cornish pump, it was the end. Even the pit donkeys had to be put down for their eyes, being accustomed to darkness since being taken into the mine many years before, were unable to cope with the sunlight.

The Wesleyans had seen fit in 1869 to make Callington the head church of a new Circuit.

LINKS WITH MURRAY BRIDGE

In the seventies the local population began to get used to the idea of a growing new centre on the River Murray for many of the workers for the construction of the Murray bridge lived at Callington and Kanmantoo. Curiously, there was in this period a request for permission to sell the Callington Wesleyan Church. The only reason now apparent for this was that the building may have already been tending towards dilapidation and a new building was needed. That was to be the reason for its final demise 60 years later for though it was very large it was completely demolished because of its poor condition.

In 1884 the Wesleyans commenced the Murray Bridge Callington Circuit with the minister at first living at Callington. The churches of the Circuit were Murray Bridge, Monarto, Callington, Kanmantoo, Hartley and St Ives. The first ordained minister of the Circuit was Rev F. Teacle in 1885. Callington was thus for two periods in its history a base Wesleyan church for the spread of the gospel.

PRIMITIVE METHODISTS

The Primitive Methodists had a similar experience for in 1886 the Kanmantoo Primitive Methodist Mission was created. It embraced churches from Dawesley to the River Murray and of course, included Callington. Its minister was Rev. W.R. Stephenson. There was a very strong social conscience in evidence in his church. His ministry ended in 1891 and sadly, so did the Kanmantoo Mission.

RECENT CHANGE

After the turn of the century Callington reverted to being an agricultural locality with a reputation for wheat growing. Little is known of the church until 1931 when the Methodists appointed to their Nairn Circuit a minister with a strong spiritual concern for the people of the area. The minister, Rev Edgar Miller, took strong steps to rebuild the work at Callington and was very soon successful. Love for God grew in such a way through his ministry that one meeting saw over 200 local and Circuit people in attendance. The superior furnishings had been shifted from the Wesleyan building for the occasion. It was through the influence of this movement that the Methodist Sunday school work was recommenced under the superintendence of Mr Alec Mills and thus it was that the writer of this article felt the first touch of God on his life.

The Sunday school was maintained consistently from that time with up to about thirty children on the roll. Just prior to the opening of the freeway the number of children in the town decreased so severely that there was simply no further Sunday school work to be done. Since that time the church has been struggling numerically. It was decided that it could no longer carry on and the last service took place on 13 February 1994.

JOHN MacNEIL - AUSTRALIAN EVANGELIST

R.J. Scrimgeour

For fifteen years in the last two decades of the 19th century (1881-1896) the name of John MacNeil was well-known around Australia for his evangelical missions. His story is told in a biography written by his wife Hannah and his teachings are contained in two books he wrote, *The Spirit-filled Life* and *Someone is Coming*. It is not generally known that he began his ministry in the Jamestown Presbyterian Church in South Australia.

EARLY LIFE

John MacNeil, who was born in Dingwall, Scotland, in 1854, came out to Australia with his family in 1860 and lived in Ballarat. After obtaining his BA at Melbourne University he went back to Scotland to do his theological studies at New College, Edinburgh, in 1876-79. On his return to Australia he was appointed to Jamestown and ordained in the Flinders Street Presbyterian Church on 1 October 1879. He had a successful ministry at Jamestown where his evangelical talents soon became evident as he entered the work with great enthusiasm and vigor. There were conversions in his services and in his meetings in shearing sheds.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

In 1880 he was joined by a student assistant William MacQueen. MacQueen, who went on to serve the church as an ordained minister in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, later wrote of MacNeil's work in Jamestown:

Jamestown was the centre for his work, and was a splendid base from which to evangelise. The work of preaching the Gospel at the surrounding stations lay heavily on his heart and right earnestly did he strive to perform what he deemed to be his duty.... Leaving me in charge of the parish he would strap hymn book and tracts upon his saddle and disappear into the regions beyond. For weeks he would be gone, no one knowing whither, and then some midnight the wanderer would return. I would be awakened from sleep either by the sound of the horse's hoofs or by the cheery tone of his voice as he sang to himself while galloping up the road. Next day, having got a fresh steed, he would be off again on a similar embassy. Some of these expeditions we undertook in company, preaching to a new shed each night and reaching a large number of men, many of whom scarcely, if ever, came in touch with the story of the Cross. Arriving at the owner's or manager's house, after a long day's drive in the burning sun, our first work was to get permission to address the men - a permission, as far as I know, never refused. Our next was to interview the cook and to arrange with him that, as soon as tea was over, he would clear away speedily. Sometimes the cook was not so easy to manage. The men having had tea and the tables being clear, MacNeil's cheery 'Roll up! Roll Up!' would be heard. In case any might have escaped, their huts were faithfully searched and all were invited to the service. This thing I will say for these men that, tired as they were from their day's work and often having preparation to make for the following day's work, it was only on rare occasions that any of them refused to come.

A REVEALING LETTER

MacNeil spoke of his work in a letter dated 20 March 1880:

Last Sabbath I preached at my usual station three times, driving 60 miles. Monday left for south, Tuesday still further south - fifty miles to Mount Barker. Preached that night and successive nights in the neighbourhood. One of these days was Show Day. That

would spoil my meeting, so I was not to be disappointed and went to the Show myself to try to drive a business for my Master. About 3000 people present. Mounted a buggy that was standing there at some distance from the main gate: struck up 'Hold the Fort' but the sinners would not gather. 'I have beaten you', said the Devil, 'Beat a retreat'. 'No, you haven't, no, I won't' so I jumped down from the buggy, made for a spring dray standing close by, jumped into it, struck up 'Hold the Fort' No. 2. Will they, will they, they HAD to hear then, and some young men and women gathered around. There was a 'Cheap Jack' blazing away 25 yards off, so I struck up as Auctioneer too, -'Buy gold and white raiment'. Many laughed, many rejoiced. God counted me worthy of only one stone which struck me on the breast. I have open air work nearly every week. Every Saturday I go to my faraway station (Jamestown) for Sabbath morning. I called at the navvies' camp by the way and preached Christ to them. This day week I was driving through a town up north at night wholly given to idolatry, and my spirit was stirred. I wheeled the horse around and struck up 'The Heavenly Bridegroom'. Got a splendid crowd and preached to them from the footplate of my buggy for ten minutes.

ITINERANT EVANGELIST

After 15 months as minister of Jamestown he resigned from the parish on 1 February 1881 and immediately began his work as an evangelist. His diary records his first Sunday:

Moonta, Sabbath Feb. 13 1881. Stayed in my room all morning; prepared address for young men on 'The Lord's Side'. Began my work with them at 2.30. There was power but not what I was expecting. This morning He told me, 'You have the enduement'. I believe Him, Alleluia, I believe Him. Preached in the Wesleyan Church, Moonta, in the evening: drove back to the mines and at 7.30 had an open air meeting; about 2000 people; spoke from the buggy in glorious moonlight; they were held spellbound by the Holy Spirit; returned to the church and had prayer meeting until 9.30; church filled. I felt so helpless going into the pulpit but spoke with power. This was my first day as EVANGELIST.

He made several trips to South Australia during the next four years as he travelled around to the various States as an evangelist. His cry was 'Australia for Christ'. In 1894 he spent a few months in this State visiting city and country areas. Some of his diary entries read:

6 June. Started at Goodwood with a crush; a great work of grace on Friday. Lord, give us a second Pentecost. Went today to Gawler and drove out to Kapunda with Dr and Mrs Torr, seeing T.P. at Rowlands Flat. Lord, bring that dear fellow into the light. Had short lesson with college boys tonight and a talk with two unconverted alone.

9 June. I am staying here (Way College, Adelaide) with my old Moonta friend W.G. Torr, now Doctor and Principal - a delightful fellow.

16 June. Started Strathalbyn on Tuesday night. There seemed to be a good feeling, but I did not catch anyone at the close. Wednesday, very good meeting and nine inquiries. Thursday night, I was completely out-generalled at the after-meeting - the fish got away through my blunderings. Lord tell me if I can handle my nets better.

CLOSING YEARS

After four years of exhausting evangelistic work in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales he took on the 'lighter work' of a parish by agreeing to accept a call in May 1885 from Waverley in New South Wales in the hope that he would recover his strength as well as do good service in that parish. After 12 months he decided that he felt well enough to resume his evangelistic work but was persuaded to spend six months a year on parish work and six months on outside evangelistic work. He worked in the Waverley parish until 1888 and later, after more full-time evangelistic ministry, he worked for the years 1890-91 in the Abbotsford parish in Victoria.

His missions to every State except Tasmania included a strenuous period among the miners in the goldfields of Western Australia where he travelled to the various fields on his bicycle. In August 1896 he gave a series of services in the City Tabernacle in Brisbane and then returned to his family in Melbourne. On 27 August 1896 he died suddenly, aged 41 years. He left a wife and five children.

Numerous memorial services throughout the land paid tribute to the work of this enthusiastic, dedicated and tireless man who considered Australia to be his parish. At least one church, the MacNeil Memorial Church in Waverley, NSW, was named in his honour. William Gray, South Australian Presbyterian historian who knew MacNeil well, said that his evangelical work was conducted with 'sane and most effective methods'. In his comparatively short life John MacNeil had greatly influenced the lives of many people throughout Australia.

ANOTHER CLARE HISTORY PUBLISHED

Following on the recent publication of a history of Presbyterianism in Clare, Mrs. Win Johnson has now written *The Methodists of Clare 1851-1977*. (Price \$10. Available from Dymocks, Rundle Mall). The book was launched by the Rev Don Howland, a former minister of the Clare circuit on Sunday, 29 May. Dr Arnold Hunt, who had attended the Clare church as a High School student, also spoke at the crowded afternoon rally.

The first Wesleyan Methodist church was opened in the town in 1857 but services had been held in homes and at Spring Farm for several years prior to that date. The Spring Farm chapel (now a ruin) a few kilometres east of Clare was opened in 1854 and was maintained by a group of Methodist settlers. The next ten years saw the vitality of Methodism in the area with churches being opened at Stanley Flat, Watervale, Penwortham, White Hut and Armagh - all within a few miles of Clare. Of the six churches in the circuit in the 1940s when visits by Wesley College theological students were common, only two - Clare and Blyth remain. Clare itself is a merger of Methodist and Presbyterian work in the town.

Clare has two historic buildings, the fruit of the work and generosity of past generations. Mrs. Johnson in her history records much of that past. By ample use of the local paper, the *Northern Argus*, there are vivid sketches of what Methodists did through the years.

This history is a useful addition to the growing store of local church narratives. For Mrs. Johnson it has been a labour of love. For those with any association with Clare it will bring back memories of people and places.

JOHN DUNN REMEMBERED

Tom Dyster

Top hats, watch chains, walking canes! Bonnets and bustles! Morning worship at the Dunn Memorial Church, Mt. Barker. It might have been that far off morning in 1884 when the church opened its doors for the first time.

But it was Sunday 25th September 1994 and the congregation had come together to commemorate the centenary of the death of John Dunn Senior and the 110th anniversary of the church he had given his people. It was part of a weekend of celebrations, a time to recall the magnanimity and the Christian witness of this man, father of Mt. Barker and progenitor of Wesleyanism in his district.

In bowler hat, waistcoat and tails, Mt. Barker minister Trevor Faggotter delivered a no nonsense children's story referring to the planting of seed in good ground as Dunn had always striven to do. Former parish minister Rev. Brian Michie preached the occasional sermon. Several families of Dunn's descendants and former church members joined with the local congregation and as had been the case 100 years before on that memorable Sunday morning, extra chairs had to be carried into the church.

PHILANTHROPY

'I have accumulated sufficient to keep me comfortable for the rest of my life', said Dunn on that occasion, 'and I have built this church as a thank offering.'

Born into a poor family in Devon, Dunn came to South Australia in 1840 at the age of 38. His Christian faith, his passion for honest toil and his thrift brought him wealth and success. By 1880 his empire of flour mills extended from Mt. Barker to Adelaide, from Port Pirie to Quorn. But prosperous as he was, his philanthropy had become legend. A church, a recreation park, housing for the people of the district were tangible results of his Christian generosity which still survive today.

HISTORICAL WALK

A walk in the steps of John Dunn was an effective introduction to the weekend of celebration. On Saturday afternoon led by local writer and historian Richard Mills, 100 people took in the Mt. Barker Mill and Dunn's gracious old residence 'The Laurels' in its park-like grounds. The walk terminated at Dunn's grave in the Mt. Barker Cemetery.

On Saturday evening, an old style social with parlour games and a nostalgic 'singalong' was a journey back to great grandma's day. After the service on Sunday a hearty luncheon and then a P.S.A. (when did we last have one of these?) with solos, instrumental items and recitations.

Throughout the entire weekend a display of memorabilia depicting the church's century of service and the life of its founder was inspected by a constant stream of visitors and locals alike.

'Like David I have desired to build a temple to the Lord', wrote Dunn of his gift to the people. Mt. Barker's congregations today can give thanks that this 'temple' has endured, to the Glory of God!

OLD CHURCH PAPER

On a recent visit to Clare the editor was presented with the 11 May 1900 issue of *The Christian Weekly and Methodist Journal*. This was the main Methodist paper that was superseded after union by the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*. The paper, preserved by Mrs. Margaret Aitken, was a special issue featuring the Twentieth Century Fund. The next issue of the *Newsletter* will have an article on this fund. The Society is grateful for this gift.

BOOK REVIEW

ROBERT MITCHELL: PIONEER MISSIONER TO THE INLAND by R.J. Scrimgeour. Available from the Open Book, 110 Gawler Place, Adelaide. Price \$15.00.

Robert Mitchell was educated and prepared for the Presbyterian ministry in South Australia, the first man to be locally trained. He was ordained at Clare in 1872. After 10 years in the Clare parish he went to Port Augusta. Then in 1894 he was commissioned as a missionary to serve at Beltana in the far north under the Smith of Dunesk scheme. This was a financial settlement (still in operation) that owed its origin to the munificence of a Mrs. Smith of Dunesk near Edinburgh, the original purpose of which was to further the evangelisation and care of aborigines.

Mitchell and his daughter, Agnes, served at Beltana for four years, his wife and other children remaining in Adelaide. The inland never lost its appeal for him. He returned to Beltana often, even supplying the station in 1928 for almost a year at the age of seventy-seven. His wife went with him this time, even though she was eighty-two. Both died soon after.

Mitchell's longest ministry was from 1899 to 1922 at Goodwood.

Rev. Bert Scrimgeour has now written the story of this long and devoted life. He has had the inestimable advantage of access to Mitchell's papers and above all to his daily diaries spanning a period of 61 years. In these Mitchell made brief notes of the day's happenings. Few ministers of the churches which came together in the Uniting Church in 1977 have had their biographies written. That Bert Scrimgeour has been able to do this for Robert Mitchell has been partly due to the latter's written legacy.

Bert Scrimgeour has written a lively and interesting account of a notable minister. He is clearly enthusiastic about his subject and this makes for a very readable narrative. He is aware of Mitchell's blemishes, especially his intolerance towards Sabbath-breakers.

Scrimgeour also brings out the cost to Mitchell's family of his devotion to duty. Life must often have been hard for his wife and family.

The core of the story is Mitchell's years at Beltana. He was a true pioneer; others such as the well-known John Flynn followed in his train. The Uniting Church Frontier Services with its outback patrols is a lineal descendant of Mitchell's work in the far north of South Australia. And it is fitting that Frontier Services will receive the profits from the sale of this book.

The book has a splendid cover-photo that illustrates how Mitchell travelled across the inland plains a century ago.

Arnold D. Hunt

GLENELG CHURCHES WALK

Just over twenty five people turned up for a visit to three of Glenelg's churches on Sunday afternoon, 11 September. The tour organised by Mr Bill Lyne went first to the Catholic Church with its impressive Greek columns in High Street. Rev. Mac Macdonald spoke about the history of the Methodist Church (now Trinity Uniting) in Moseley Street, with particular reference to its stained-glass windows. The windows from the old Bath Street church are now housed at Trinity. The tour concluded at St Andrew's (formerly Jetty Road Congregational) where Mrs Lois Donaldson outlined the church's history, including the long ministry of Rev Charles Manthorpe, and described the recent changes in the interior design and furnishings of the building.

A SIMILAR TOUR WILL BE ORGANISED BY THE SOCIETY IN ANOTHER SUBURB IN THE SPRING NEXT YEAR.