

**THE UNITING CHURCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



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**NEWSLETTER**

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## **HISTORY WALK**

The Society's annual 'History Walk' will be held at North Adelaide on Sunday afternoon, 22 September.

Meet at Christ Church (Anglican), Jeffcott Street at 2 p.m.

At 2.45 p.m. we will go to the old Primitive Methodist Church (now Channel 9) at the corner of Wellington Square and Tynte Street.

Then to the Baptist church in Tynte Street.

The walk will conclude at the Archer Street Church (originally Wesleyan, then Methodist and now Presbyterian).

We will have a cup of tea and biscuits with the Presbyterians at Archer Street.

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## THE CHURCHMANSHIP OF A POLITICIAN

# SHIRLEY WILLIAM JEFFRIES

by Stan Parr

Shirley William Jeffries was born on 28 February 1886 near Manchester, England, son of Rev William Jeffries and his wife Mercy. The family migrated to Queensland while young Shirley was still an infant and in 1898 they moved to South Australia. Jeffries attended school in Kadina, completing his education at Prince Alfred College and the University of Adelaide from which he graduated LL.B. in 1909.

As a young man, Jeffries played tennis and Australian Rules football for the University and later played for Norwood and then Sturt in the South Australian National Football League. Admitted to the Bar in 1910, he practised law in Adelaide, eventually becoming senior partner in the legal firm of Fisher, Jeffries, Brebner and Taylor.

### Parliamentary Career

As a member of the Liberal Federation, Jeffries became member of Parliament for North Adelaide in 1927. When the Hill Labour Government was returned in a landslide in 1930, Jeffries was defeated but he was returned for the district of Torrens in 1933. With the advent of single-member electoral districts in 1938, he held the seat of Torrens until 1944. Defeated in a wartime swing to Labour in 1944, he recaptured the seat in 1947 and held it until his retirement in 1953.

In 1938, on the resignation of Liberal Premier Richard Butler, Jeffries was one of four members who were considered for leadership of the party. In the event, the popular Tom Playford was elected Premier and it is a matter of conjecture whether Jeffries would have made a better Premier. At all events Playford, supported by a rather helpful electoral system and possibly riding on a tide of wartime and post-war support as a returned soldier from the first war, reigned until 1965, a record term of 27 years as head of a government for the British Commonwealth.

Jeffries proved a loyal supporter of both Butler and Playford and served as Attorney-General, Minister of Education and Ministry of Industry and Employment from 1933 to 1944. Re-elected in 1947, he served as a back bencher in the Playford Government until his retirement in 1953. In the latter year Jeffries received the honour of a knighthood.

### Methodist service.

As a Methodist layman, Jeffries was always active. He was Superintendent of the outer suburban Blackwood Methodist Sunday School as a young man and, while there, he formed a rich and rewarding friendship with the Rev W J Mortimer.

Elected to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1917 at the early

age of 31, Jeffries remained a South Australian representative to the triennial Assembly until 1960. At State level he served simultaneously on as many as 14 committees. These included the Methodist Ladies College, Prince Alfred College, and Wesley College. When the Methodist Conference decided to found a University College, Jeffries was elected to its first Council and Finance Committee. He served for some years on the Lincoln College Council and, when it became evident that the College was firmly established, he withdrew from the Council. As a member of these committees, he brought to bear his immense fund of knowledge and experience gained as a parliamentarian generally and as Minister of Education in particular. One of Jeffries' final acts as a churchman was his participation in fund raising for the newly established Westminster School at Marion. As a tribute to his efforts, the chapel at the college and one of the original houses were named after him.

### Social issues

The years between 1938 and 1953 saw the emergence of a triune relationship on social issues involving Tom Playford, Shirley Jeffries and the Rev Harry Woolacott (Superintendent of the Methodist Social Service and Industrial Fellowship Department). By the time of Tom Playford's zenith from 1941 to 1953, Woolacott was the guiding light in liaison with Playford's Government on behalf of the Methodist Church in South Australia. At 2.30 promptly on each sitting Wednesday afternoon, when private members' business was before the House, Woolacott would slip unostentatiously into the Speaker's Gallery and take his seat in the second row on the Government side.

During the next two hours he would confer, sometimes with Playford but more often with Jeffries, on the progress of the business before the Assembly.

Thus, Jeffries became the effective link between the Methodist Church and the Government of the day. On social issues such as restrictions on the sale of liquor and on facilities for gambling, Jeffries could always be relied on to support the attitude of the Protestant Churches - and in this regard it must be remembered that, according to the 1947 census, Methodists comprised almost 27% of the South Australian population.

### Speeches.

On the question of where Jeffries stood on moral issues, it is relevant to examine statements made by him in debate, especially early in his parliamentary career. Thus, in his maiden speech on 3 August 1927, Jeffries praised the Gunn Labour Government for its efforts to provide cheap housing for the workers:

*.....it does not matter who introduces a beneficial Bill or a good policy provided the public get the benefit....Perhaps the most spectacular piece of work which the late Government did was that known as the Thousand Homes Scheme, which was well staged. The scheme was admirable.*

Jeffries went on to quote Earl Beaconsfield in support of his stance:

*.....I have always felt that the best security for civilisation is the dwelling, and that upon properly appointed and becoming dwellings depends more than anything else the improvement of mankind. They are the nursery of all domestic virtues and without a becoming dwelling the exercise of these virtues is impossible..*

Proceeding, Jeffries saw such housing schemes as the Thousand Homes Scheme as 'one of the best methods of counteracting the tide of Bolshevism and Communism':

*.....Once a man has his own home he is much more likely to be content, to practise the old-time virtue of thrift and to develop that family life which in the past has been one of the foundations of British national character.*

On the battle between capital and labour, Jeffries saw each complementing the other:

*.....Capital and labour do not seem to me to be as so many think natural foes to one another. Capital and labour are complementary: neither one is complete without the other.*

On 22 November 1927, Jeffries firmly nailed his colours to the mast by stating his attitude on gambling. In speaking to the Coursing Restriction Bill, he said:

*.....I have nothing against tin hare racing as a sport by itself, but I am opposed to gambling in every form.....Our duty as legislators, as far as possible, is to make it more easy to do right and more difficult to do wrong.*

When an honourable member interjected "Killjoy!", Jeffries responded:

*....Prohibition of gambling does not kill joy: it increases it....When gambling in certain excessive forms enters a home it kills joy.*

In the following year, on 24 October 1928, when speaking on the Indecent Reports (Restriction) Bill, Jeffries 'commended the Government for introducing this measure and for running the risk of being dubbed puritanical'. He continued:

*....It is time an attempt was made to stop the circulation of indecent literature. There is no dividing line of creed or*

*religion. We stand on a common platform, with an undivided policy in our determination to do all we can to ensure pure and clean minds in the citizens of the future.*

As Minister of Education, Jeffries advocated religious instruction in State schools, the legislation being passed in 1940.

#### Place in Church

Possibly the greatest influence on the life and thinking of Jeffries was his father. Jeffries was a true 'son of the manse' and throughout his life remained committed to the Methodist Church at both State and Federal levels. For a generation he was undoubtedly the most influential Methodist layman in South Australia, as a member of many boards, councils and committees within the Church.

Tall and handsome, Jeffries was an excellent debater, both in Parliament and the Methodist Conference. Some having dealings with him may have been tempted to think him aloof and distant, but there are many stories that recall his acts of kindness to those less fortunate than himself.

During his final term in Parliament Jeffries was stricken with cancer of the voice box. This complaint hastened his departure from political life.

Jeffries died suddenly on 13 September 1963 and, after cremation, his ashes were interred in his parents' grave in the Payneham cemetery.

In a tribute penned by a fellow layman at the time of his death Jeffries was described as 'a true friend, a man of irreproachable and unselfish character, always seeking opportunities of helping others, who above all by his own life showed an abiding zeal in the service of his Master and and of his Church'.

## BIBLE CHRISTIANS ON THE GULF ROAD

The track used by teamsters with their bullock waggons to cart rich copper ore from Burra to Port Henry (Port Wakefield) was first tested in November of 1848.

The Gulf Road, as it became known, gave birth to many mid-north towns like Auburn, Watervale, Undaly, Hoyleton and Balaklava. With evangelistic zeal and vision the Bible Christians and Wesleyans planted chapels in most of these small rural communities.

It was a mild Saturday afternoon and we had decided to trace the steps of our Cornish Bible Christian fathers in the faith. Hoyles Plain, a fertile area near the Clare Hills and west of Auburn, was to be our first port of call. Few farms remain now but we passed the old Hoyleton Pub that still manages to sell an occasional pie or pasty. We were looking for the south-east corner of section 11 in the Hundred of Hall. This spot was the original site of a local Bible Christian "Preaching House" where we knew Rev Thomas Hillman conducted a baptism in 1859. We eventually found the place of the now demolished building about a kilometre from the old town. Among the few details preserved we noted that Rev Samuel Keen, the "fire-brand" from the early Gawler/Angle Vale Mission, was one of the original trustees and that the section was granted to Mr Malachi Brain, a faithful layman and his wife Louisa on 8 October, 1862. We would learn more about this couple as the day unfolded.

Our parishioners, Reg and Barbara Chapman, were keen to show us over their farm on the plain and the leased area stretching into the hills. We climbed slowly around a wide, unused

public road and it came as no surprise when Reg explained we were driving on the actual track used by the early imported mule teams that assisted with carting copper. The main bullock team road was further south. Nearby Mt George is 900 feet above sea level and looking west it is said, on a clear day, that you can see the Gulf and Ardrossan. After admiring the view, we drove through the rolling hills and trees until we came to the ruin of what had been a grand two-storey home set into a hill face. This isolated old home set in the hills was the home of Malachi and Louisa Brain, known as Bromley Park. Although well decayed, the floor cross beams remained intact. The house, with its open fire place on both floors, overlooked a creek fed by a spring and the drinking well, although covered, was still in place. The preserved evidence of a way of life so different from our own made this untouched, isolated spot rather intimate and special.

As we passed the old fence that lined the home block, we recalled that Malachi had been part of a remarkable growth of the Bible Christian Church in the area. In 1860, it is said a great revival broke out at Watervale and spread next day to Auburn, during which at least 200 were converted. The Methodists had built 18 chapels and 4 parsonages in the area.

We came to a place known as Skillogalee Creek, a beautiful untouched area adorned with ancient redgums and wild cherry trees. There, floodlit by the afternoon sun, we came across a small stone chapel with a magnificent view of the wooded hills and valleys. Above the door was a heavy stone lintel with the words ZION AD 1862 carved into the

surface. (Zion means a 'holy hill where God dwells')

Malachi Brain had donated the land for this quaint chapel with its own open fireplace to serve the people of Skillogalee Creek. Fortunately today the chapel is being reroofed and preserved by its private owner and in the tiny cemetery that is still used, the grave of Malachi Brain remains clearly marked.

It was in the pretty gully below the chapel that the popular circuit harvest festival picnics were once held. People in those days gathered for miles around. Sulkies, traps and tethered horses would line the roads leading to this pretty spot.

We had shared a magic afternoon and glimpse of the past together but this was just one of many stories yet to be told.  
- From Rev Ted Cumow, Balaklava

### A LETTER FROM THE PAST

*(This unusual letter was sent to us by Mrs Mary Marlow, granddaughter of the Rev Brian Wibberley, a leading Methodist minister in the early years of this century. The writer was the Rev Henry Howard, the well-known preacher at Pirie Street at the time. Ed.)*

The Manse, Pirie Street

March 27, 1905

My dear old Scribberley,

Will you give my people a chance for their souls by taking the S.S.A. service on the morning of the 2nd Sunday in May? Do if you can. Let the "man & the hour" meet for once. I will, in a humble, following-afar-off way endeavour to fill your place on that morning if agreeable to you or I will even supply the place of anyone else that you might prefer. Anything, anywhere, anyhow. If however you can't come, well go and put the the thing you call your head into a receptacle formed by coarse sacking & thus improve your

outlook on the world of men & things. You lovely creature. All nature is waiting for your advent - the sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills & the plains. Your name is whispered on the midnight star beam. I heard it myself & felt it tremble with its message of hope while down at Glenelg today. The wild waves thundered "Wibberley is coming" & then spread themselves in silver beauty at my feet, expiring in a rapture of expectant joy! Fact. Solemn sober earnest downright fact. But these are the facts that only the purged vision can detect & which are denied to common eyes & ears. But enough - Can you come? May you come? Will you come?

I "paws" for your reply, Yours lovingly, tenderly, expectantly, but apprehensively,

Howard.

My dear old Scribberley  
will you give me  
a chance for their souls by taking the S.S.A.  
on the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in May  
you can let the man & the hour meet  
I will, in a humble & following-afar-off  
endeavour to fill your place on that  
if agreeable to you. I will even supply  
place of anyone else that you might  
prefer. Anything, anywhere, anyhow. If  
you can't come, well go & put the  
the thing you call your head into a  
receptacle formed by coarse sacking &  
thus improve your  
outlook on the world of men & things.  
You lovely creature. All nature is  
waiting for your advent. - The  
sun, the moon, the stars, the seas,  
the hills & the plains. Your name  
is whispered on the midnight

## EASTWOOD DISPLAY

On Sunday 10 March 1996, the editor opened an historical exhibition in what was once the Eastwood Methodist Church on Glen Osmond Road. Prepared by Mr Colin Watson, the custodian of Uniting Church historical material, it was an excellent display from the old Eastwood church, especially from the 1930s and 1940s.

Eastwood was originally a Bible Christian chapel, known as 'Little Glory', built in 1880. It was one of three Methodist churches built at the time in the Parkside area, the others being Parkside West (Primitive Methodist) and Parkside (Wesleyan). Eastwood was closed in 1960

and the congregation united with that at Parkside, the church being renamed 'Epworth'.

The Eastwood property was sold to the Burnside Council and became a community centre. It is now used on Sundays by the Epworth Devotional Fellowship.

An interesting feature of the display was the original pulpit of the Eastwood church. Many young preachers, including the editor on 28 May 1930, preached their first sermons in this church. The pulpit has now been presented to the Historical Society by Mr. Watson.

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compiled by W J Stafford

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