

**THE UNITING CHURCH IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



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**NEWSLETTER  
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*September Walk*

**The Society's History Walk will be held this year on SUNDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER. Meet at 1.55 p.m. in front of St Peter's Cathedral King William Rd. North Adelaide**

**There should be no problem with parking as there is no football at the Adelaide Oval that day. Please be on time at the Cathedral, as special arrangements are being made for us.**

**We begin at 2 p.m. with a tour of the Cathedral. This will be followed at 3 p.m. by a visit to the Friends (Quaker) Meeting House at the rear of the Cathedral.**

**At 3.30 we will move to the historic Brougham Place Uniting Church. Afternoon tea will follow the visit.**

**Arrangements for the Walk are in the hands of Brian Jones (Phone: 8223 6414).**

## LITTLE PARA PILGRIMS

By James Potter.

Reviewed by Arnold D. Hunt

As he states in a note at the beginning of his book, James Potter was born within 200 metres of the Methodist church in John Street, Salisbury. It is clear that the church (and its successor in Park Terrace) has played an important part in his life and in that of other families long resident in Salisbury. Now as a member of the Uniting Church and as President of the Salisbury and District Historical Society, Mr Potter has written a thoroughly comprehensive history of the church in John Street and its successor.

Primitive Methodism began in South Australia with an open-air service in Light Square in 1840. A church was built in the town of Adelaide and soon after one at East Parade, Norwood, and another at Islington. Within ten years the Primitive Methodists had established work in the country towns of Mount Barker and Salisbury. At first their success was dwarfed by the stronger Wesleyans, but they had several churches, notably along the old Melbourne road at Dawesley, Kanmantoo and Callington.

In Salisbury the situation was very different. The Primitive Methodists became the major church in the area. The Wesleyans erected a chapel at Hillbank north-east of the Old Spot Hotel on the Main North Road. It prospered only moderately and all that survives today of this Wesleyan cause is a small graveyard. In Salisbury itself, the Wesleyans built a church in Chapel Street on the western side of the railway line. This did not become a major church and it remained a distant outpost of the Archer Street, North Adelaide circuit.

Rather less often than the Bible Christians, the Primitive Methodists sometimes gave biblical names to their churches. In Salisbury they called their church, built in 1857, Hephzibah ("My delight is in her"). Hephzibah was the "delight" of the Salisbury Methodists

for over a century until its demolition in 1960 and its replacement by the present church a few hundred metres away.

Primitive Methodism grew steadily in the town and a preaching plan for 1863, printed on page 22 of Mr Potter's book, records services outside the town at Gawler River (Carclew), Burton, Sturton and Greenwith. These have disappeared but posterity can see what the churches were like by looking at the photographs on pages 28 and 29.

Mr Potter gives a list of the ministers who served in Salisbury both before and after Methodist Union in 1900. The Primitive Methodist list begins with John Standrin in 1857. The author gives a full account of Primitive Methodism in the last century. This is followed by a section on the Wesleyans.

After union in 1900 Methodism remained a lively part of the town and a description is given of the various organisations spawned by the church. The story continues with a final chapter on the Uniting Church since 1977.

Long before that time Salisbury had ceased to be a quiet country town and had been transformed into an outer suburb of Adelaide. There could have been a bit more in Mr Potter's account of the social changes since the Second World War. A graph showing membership totals, especially in the latter stages, would have been an instructive addition to Mr Potter's record.

One of the most striking features of this book is the number of old photographs. There must be several score of them and I was left wondering where he obtained them all. Old ministers are here such as James Wayland (1864-66), a very able minister who soon after leaving Salisbury became an Anglican priest. John Gibbon Wright, whose name is inexplicably absent from the *Biographical Index of South Australia*, is

here. He served two terms at Salisbury and at the time of Methodist Union was one of the most respected Primitive Methodist ministers in the colony.

The final section of the book consists of fifteen appendices (80 pages) which, along with other information, list the office-holders in the church's organisations. One cannot but wonder at the industry that the compiling of these involved.

If you want to know who was Chief Knight of the Order of Knights in 1938 or who was secretary of the Women's Auxiliary of Overseas Missions in 1950, this record will

tell you.

The writing of this history has clearly been a labour of love for Mr Potter and he is to be thanked and complimented for the persistence, patience and thoroughness that have gone into the preparation of this history.

The book has 252 pages and several maps and is well produced and printed on good paper. It is available from the publisher, Salisbury and District Historical Society, (PO Box 838, Salisbury 5108) and from the Uniting Church parish office. Soft cover \$27; hard cover \$35.

## CURRAMULKA CELEBRATES 120 YEARS

Heavy rain, welcomed by the farming community, failed to dampen the high spirits of the celebrations for 120 years of Wesleyan, Methodist and Uniting Church worship at Curramulka.

On Sunday, April 14, 1998, many members of farming families, the town and district returned to join with Curramulka people to celebrate the life of their Curramulka Church.

Rev'd George Potter dedicated a cairn erected on the site of the first church buildings. *The Christian Weekly*, April 21, 1882, reported:

"For the last three or four years the adherents of the Wesleyan Church at Curramulka have been worshipping in an antiquated galvanized iron structure, destitute of all comfort, beauty or resemblance to a place of worship. The Church, like the Tabernacle in the wilderness, has been a kind of portable one, ... It has hitherto been unable to find a permanent resting place, and with the aid of bullocks and drays, has been subject to three removals. On Sunday, March 26th a new Church was opened

temporarily for divine worship, ... at present it is unplastered and unceiled."

This building served as a place of worship for just over 29 years, when it was replaced by the present building, and then served as the Sunday School room until salt damp made demolition necessary early in the 1990s.

Mr Alan Jones, a past school teacher in the area, gave a brief history of the Curramulka Church and its buildings.

Mr Potter preached the sermon in which he reminded the people that church buildings for worship are centres of the deep personal, emotional experience and feelings of every community. Both the very sad and grieving experiences and the joyous happy occasions are brought to the church's place of worship. He then asked how our relationship with God, in Christ, might show in the way we live in creation and in the way we work with creation "are we slowly realising that creation is not just a commodity we purchase bits of, or take however much for our purposes".

He saw here an opportunity for rural Christianity. As these communities are close

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## WAY COLLEGE PUPILS

Dr Bob Petersen, a Sydney educationist, has long had an interest in Way College, the Bible Christian boys' school that opened on Greenhill Road, Wayville in 1892. The site in 1903 became the central building of the Methodist Ladies College and then, with union in 1977, Annesley College.

The reason for Dr Petersen's interest lies in the curriculum introduced by the school's only headmaster, Dr W.G. Torr. Fresh from five years of study in Britain, Torr had an enormous reputation when he opened the school. It lasted only 11 years and its demise was one of the consequences of Methodist Union in 1900.

Dr Petersen envisages the eventual publication of a full-scale study of the school. As a prelude to this he has compiled a list of the eleven hundred boys who were enrolled at the school. Some entries contain brief notes such as date of birth, father's name while other entries are limited to the boys' names.

Way College had a small group of

ministerial students, older than most of the boys, and one finds in the list the names of several men who later became members of the Methodist ministry - Edgar Caust, Percy Tilbrook and George Shapley.

In the compilation of his list, the author draws on school magazines, Old Boys' publications and articles by Dr Torr in the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, the Methodist paper.

His task would have been easier if he had had access to the Admissions Register. After the closure of the school this appears to have been taken by Dr Torr. He used it in 1924 when editing a book on John Thorne and in 1925 he referred to it in an obituary in the church paper.

What happened to the register and the mass of memorabilia in Torr's cottage in Wattle Avenue, Brighton, after his death in 1939 is something of a mystery.

*The Pupils of Way College* is available from Annesley College at a cost of \$8 (plus postage \$2). It will be of interest mainly to descendants of old boys of the school.

A.D.H.



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to the natural created order, a challenge is for Christianity to accept a new openness of mind and heart, which transcends the restrictions of rural economies, to new awareness and understandings of the sacredness of creation and the unity of that sacredness with human life. "And maybe, just maybe, rural Christianity will

become such that God can use it to lead his Church into a closer relationship with himself in his work of creation and in his work of redemption in Jesus Christ."

The celebrations gave opportunity for those present to remember the ways in which they shared their faith in the life and work of their church at Curramulka.

## THE ROMANCE OF FAITH Brian Wibberley, 1866-1944

By Lewis Kelsall

Brian Wibberley was born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, England, on 7th November, 1866. His father was a miller and Brian was brought up in the Primitive Methodist Church.

Little is known about his early education but he was not lacking scholastically. Something of his precocity, spiritual formation and rapid advancement within the Primitive Methodist Connexion in England is captured at the time of his election to the presidential chair of the Methodist Conference in Western Australia in 1915. He stated that he was born in 1866, "born again" in 1877; was a Sunday School teacher at 12 ... a fully accredited Local Preacher at 14; a candidate for the ministry at 18; a probationer at 19 and was sent as a foreign missionary to Australia!

Wibberley commenced his ministry at Collingwood, Victoria, in 1886 and after a succession of appointments came to the prestigious pulpit of the Primitive Methodist Church in Wellington Square, Adelaide.

### Wellington Square

Wibberley commenced his ministry at Wellington Square in 1898 during preparations for church union which took place in 1900. This church was described as the "cathedral" of Primitive Methodism in S.A. In this appointment, he was following a succession of distinguished preachers such as Hugh Gilmore, "the fervent poet-prophet" and John Day Thompson who, in 1896, had to answer a heresy charge from within his own denomination in England. Both these men were vigorous exponents of liberal theology and powerful advocates of the social gospel.

Wibberley soon won for himself the reputation of a preacher and orator. He was

described as a man of "divine passion".

An Adelaide journal reported:

"he is one of the most democratic preachers in the Church today ... a hard hitter, whose utterances come from a cultured and virile brain" and as "having attracted much attention by reason of his fearless deliverances, for people listening to him recognise the dogmatism of the scholar and the broad views of a man of warm sympathies."

He was also credited with being an authority on Carlyle, Ruskin and Emerson.

### Influence of Romanticism

Wibberley, like many pulpit giants of his era, was influenced by Romanticism. This helped define and characterise his emotional and intellectual orientation to the Christian faith.

Frederick Gill has claimed

"that Methodism itself has its roots in the romantic past, and that its central figures in the 18th century and their activities in it exhibited a romantic atmosphere of sustained vitality, warm human passion, intense emotion and imaginative sensibility."

The romantic ethos of Methodism with the intensely personal hymns of Charles Wesley, together with the romantic poets of the 19th century such as Shelley, Keats, Byron, Arnold and Tennyson, inspired and fed Wibberley's imagination and are frequently quoted in his sermons and writings.

That Wibberley saw the Christian faith itself as a "great romance" is brilliantly encapsulated in his presidential address to the S.A. Methodist Conference in 1926, entitled simply "Adventure". In colourful

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imagery, scintillating prose, striking illustrations and literary allusions, it contained the sweep of Christian philosophy according to an evangelical, liberal non-conformist, for in it, Wibberley perceived the whole act of creation and redemption, with its attendant risks and dangers, as a great "romance" - a divine adventure.

### **The Editor**

From 1904 until leaving for Perth in 1911, Wibberley was editor of *The Australian Christian Commonwealth* - a task he combined with connexional responsibilities and demanding appointments at Payneham and Kent Town. Although his prose tended to be a little florid, he did nevertheless reveal himself as a man with a clear incisive mind with a detailed knowledge of the issues he addressed.

As an apologist, he threw himself into the central debates and controversies relating to science and religion, Darwin's theory of evolution, and agnosticism. He was an admirer of the author and journalist, G.K. Chesterton, whom he recognised as a clever and witty defender of the faith, able to counteract the attacks of scepticism, agnosticism and rationalism with humour and literary flair.

As a Christian moralist, Wibberley addressed social issues and wrestled with the moral dilemmas of his day and tried to give leadership and guidance to his readers. He was quick to warn against the isolation of politics from religion as always leading to a political life dominated by dividends and self-interest.

His later writings, concerning the First World War, were very influential throughout the church as an attempt to justify the ways of God to men and women.

### **The Methodist**

Wibberley spoke of the "Evangel of the strangely warmed heart" as the "Magna Carta of the Methodist Church" - an experience involving trust in Christ alone for salvation, the assurance of sins forgiven, the

centrality of supplicatory prayer, and the need to testify to such an experience. He warned that if "Methodism ever becomes anything less...it will cease to be the epochal Methodism that awakened the world."

Something of his faith experience is enlarged upon in his first book, *Marks of Methodism*, published in 1905. Doubtless it found a prominent place on ministers' and probationers' shelves.

In this book Wibberley stated that of Methodism's essential marks, passion is characteristic, the *sine qua non*, the prime fundamental, for compared with this all else is secondary. He continued, "Relatively, Methodism is not a system but a soul; not an institution but an indwelling; not an organisation but an organism." He concluded, "To realise the divine passion moving through a 'heart strangely warmed' - that is the principle, the characteristic trait, the all in all of Methodism."

Some might claim that this divine passion, this soul and this indwelling needs to be rediscovered in the Church of today.

### **Summary**

Brian Wibberley, the Primitive Methodist, was (as Arnold D. Hunt has noted) a great gift to the united Methodism. He was a distinguished preacher, orator and occupied the pulpits of some of Methodism's largest churches.

He was a public figure, a man of learning and culture. He had a university degree in music and published two books: *Marks of Methodism* (1905) and the more substantial, scholastic work, *Music and Religion* (1934).

He was a man of humour and warm sympathies, loved by his people as the stained glass windows at the back of Kent Town Uniting Church testify.

He died in 1944 and was interred in the Methodist cemetery in Payneham. The brief inscription on his tombstone signalling his ongoing adventure in faith, "I hail the dawning in Immanuel's land".

## METHODIST HOME MISSIONS

Walter Stafford

Wesleyan, Primitive and Bible Christian Methodists, barely established in South Australia, were conscious of John Wesley's reply to the Bishop of Bristol when forbidden to preach, "My Lord, I look upon the world as my parish".

"This part of the world is our responsibility," they would have replied if similarly ordered.

As people moved out into country areas and railway lines began to spread, land was acquired at named sidings where trains would pass each other. Similar action was taken where stage coaches changed horses.

Many years later it was discovered that a hotel had been built on a forgotten block of land which had been allocated to the Methodist Church!

### **Who were to staff these mission areas?**

Invariably, young men who aspired to be ministers were sent by the church as Home Missionaries to "test their call".

1895 Bible Christian Bush Missionaries equipped with a Bible, bicycle, a five pound note (\$10) and the blessing of the church, covered the developing pastoral areas between Peterborough and Broken Hill.

1909 Moses Gabb, later to become a politician, worked the Murray River settlements with a launch, "Endeavour", and bicycle to reach settlers further out.

1919 Following World War I, soldier settlements were opened up in scrub country. Arthur D. McCutcheon was sent to settlements along the Murray River (see his booklet "Missioning the Murray").

1923 Bill Curry, newly arrived from England, went to Darke's Peak in the centre of Eyre Peninsula. He passed the test and two years later took up his first ministerial appointment at Glenelg.

And so the story could be told over and over again.

### **Soldier Settlements**

These were opened up after World War I in scrub country on which were erected two sheds - uprights with roof but no walls - and two water tanks. One became the house, the walls being superphosphate bags or trees cut in the scrub; spaces between them were filled with mud.

In many places the amount of land proved too small to provide an adequate living standard and many were forced off the land. Neighbours who subsequently acquired the vacant improved blocks were able to make a reasonable living.

Services were held in some of the homes, in one-teacher schools, in multi-purpose halls often situated in the corner of a paddock at cross roads. In a few places where there was a small church, a room at the back became the residence of the Home Missionary.

Transport was on bicycle, horseback or jinker and, when roads improved, motor bikes.

### **Finance**

To maintain this ministry, grants were made by the Home Mission Department to supplement money raised locally, which was rarely enough.

The department raised money by deputations to established churches. Special appeals on Home Mission Sunday were made and at the Annual Conference Tea Meetings followed by the Home Mission Rally held in such places as the former Exhibition Building on North Terrace, Adelaide Town Hall, Adelaide Oval or Wayville Showgrounds.

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### Post World War II

Population growth diverted much Home Mission assistance to new suburbs and other development areas.

Through the Church Extension Fund (1956-61) generous giving and loans, particularly from former Home Mission areas, made possible the erection of new churches and halls.

Slowly the need for new roles developed. Home Missions expanded to include Chaplains in hospitals, gaols, immigration and industry, the establishment of Resthaven Homes for the Aged, Babies' Home at Brighton and the Deaconess Order.

The growth of the Methodist Inland Mission (now Frontier Services) also needed support in money and personnel.

While the Department, as such, no longer exists, the work continues.

## MARCH MEETING

There was a good attendance on Sunday afternoon, 29 March, for the Annual General Meeting of the Society. The meeting was chaired by the President (Rev Ron Hayward) and the officers of the council for 1998 were elected (see below).

The primary purpose of the meeting was to hear an address by the Rev Lewis Kelsall BA (Hons) on the Rev Brian Wibberley, a Methodist minister of some prominence in the early years of this century. Wibberley's life and thought were the subject of Mr Kelsall's recently completed history honours thesis for Flinders University. The thesis was entitled *The Romance of Faith* which was also the title of his address, now published by the society.

Mr Kelsall indicates that Wibberley had a distinguished ministry, especially at North Adelaide, Wesley Church (Perth) and Kent Town.

There may still be a few people around who heard him preach. He was clearly an eloquent orator of a type that does not exist today. Reading the printed material that survives, one sometimes wonders if the substance of his ideas not sometimes submerged beneath the foam of his eloquence.

The publication, *The Romance of Faith*, is available from the Uniting Church Historical Society, 19 Malvern Avenue, Malvern 5061. Price \$3 plus \$2 postage. (Phone 8271 8515).

## MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL 1998

President: Ron Hayward

Vice-President: Walter Stafford

Secretary: George Potter

Treasurer: George Wright

Editor: Arnold Hunt

Gaye Brown, Val Canty, Brian Jones, David Shield, Colin Watson

Co-opted members: Keith Batt, Ted Curnow, Don Haydon,

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