



# Uniting History SA June 2019

Guest Editor: Leanne Davis

## *Finding a home in the Uniting Church...*

This has been the theme of this year's Uniting Church National History Conference in Melbourne. This newsletter comes to you from Melbourne as the conference concludes and we all head home reflecting on the stories we have heard, the history we have shared and the connections we have made or renewed.



**Conference attendees on a sunny winter's morning**

Photo: Glen O'Brien

Fifty-four people gathered at the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Melbourne over the June long weekend for the second national conference. All states and synods were represented, and South Australia was particularly well represented with nine members of our society at the conference.

Three excellent keynote speakers—Dr Meredith Lake, Dr Joanna Cruickshank and Prof. Graeme Davison—all reminded us of the importance of remembering, recording and writing our religious history as well as sharing our stories, even in a more secular society.



**Dr Meredith Lake**

Photo: Leanne Davis

Another twenty papers were presented by members of the Society and other historians. We heard stories about local congregations, of significant and interesting people in the church and how the antecedent denominations have left their marks on the Uniting Church of today.

We toured some of the significant churches in Melbourne—one group walking the stations of the cross around the Melbourne CBD, and another visiting the Presbyterian and Uniting Churches in St. Kilda. A third group was given a glimpse of the significant and historic library that is part of Queen's College.



**Pentecost worship  
at Church of All  
Nations (Carlton)**

Photo: Leanne Davis

We worshipped together, shared food together, and shared many more stories together outside of the conference sessions. I think all who were there enjoyed the weekend. I know I did and I appreciated the chance to make connections with people that have already done some research into the area of the involvement of women in the early church (one of my areas of research interest).

Those of us who were at the conference will be sharing more stories at our upcoming AGM (see page 3 for details). We are looking forward to sharing these with everyone as we continue to

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### **News from the History Centre**

Volunteers continue to serve the church and the wider community by providing advice and assistance for those involved in researching church, local and family history.

The centre welcomes volunteers to help manage the large and growing collection of documents, memorabilia, books and records of churches and agencies.

The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, is open on Wednesday afternoons from 1:00pm to 4:00pm

*(Other contact details can be found on page 2.)*

## The UCA History Centre

Open Wednesdays 1 - 4pm

44A East Ave

Black Forest

Website:

[historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au](http://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au)

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA](http://www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA)

### CORRESPONDENCE:

E: [manager@ucsahistory.org.au](mailto:manager@ucsahistory.org.au)

Post: UCA Historical Society

44A East Ave, Black Forest, SA, 5035

Phone: 08 8297 8472

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

Judith Raftery (President)

David Houston (Vice President)

Robert Backhouse (Treasurer)

Doug Hosking (Secretary)

Glenys Edwards (Minute Secretary)

Jonathan Barker

Brian Chalmers

Dean Eland

Judy Eland

Lindsay Faulkner

Bill Harris

Barbara Hayes

Don Hopgood

You can receive this newsletter via email. Send your email address to [office@ucsahistory.org.au](mailto:office@ucsahistory.org.au) and we will send you our up-to-date news and other items of interest.

### Membership of the Society

Individual—1 year           \$20

Individual—5 years           \$80

Individual—Life               \$250

Congregational—Life       \$250

Contact the Centre for more information.

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consider what it means for us all to be 'Finding a home in the Uniting Church.'

In this issue of the newsletter, we have the third of three articles from David Hilliard from *Quiz and the Lantern*—this time about the Congregational Church in Adelaide in the late nineteenth century. We also have some photos (thanks to Rosemary) and information from two of our events earlier this year—our open house afternoon, and the SA History Month display at Scots Church (*Beyond the Armistice: How did we respond?*).

The program of events for the rest of the year is on the back page. There are a number of exciting events still to take place this year.

We are always looking for stories and photos to be included in the newsletters. Stories (and photos) can be about people, places, events, or organisations of the Uniting Church or its antecedent denominations. If you have something you would like to share, we would love to hear from you. Please get in touch, either by phone (8297 8472) or emailing [office@ucsahistory.org.au](mailto:office@ucsahistory.org.au).

### In Memoriam

#### Brian Jones OAM

02 March 1927 — 02 June 2019

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Brian Jones OAM on 2 June 2019. Brian was one of our long-standing members and former member of the Council.

He was a member of Pilgrim Uniting Church, a former Congregationalist and an enthusiastic local authority on Congregationalist history.

We offer our deepest sympathies to Brian's family at this sad time.

A longer tribute to Brian will be included in the next newsletter.



## Sunday 23 June—Annual General Meeting

*(Please note: Change of venue)*

**2:00pm**

***The Annual General meeting of the Historical Society***

**2:30pm**

*Stories from the National Conference  
Update on the National UCA History Society  
Stories from some "Prospect Boys"*

**4:00pm**

Afternoon tea (please bring a small plate to share)

When: 2:00pm—4:30pm

Where: Prospect Road Uniting Church  
174 Prospect Road, Prospect

(Parking available on Prospect Road and Bosanquet Avenue)

### Calling all treasure hunters and puzzle enthusiasts...

Do you enjoy

- ◇ Treasure hunts;
- ◇ Solving mysteries and puzzles;
- ◇ Learning more about people, places and events?

If you answered yes to these, you might like to consider volunteering at the History Centre on Wednesday afternoons.

These are the sorts of tasks that our volunteers undertake each week.

We never know what treasures might be found as donations to our collection are unpacked, sorted and catalogued, and volunteers help other researchers with their queries.

Get in touch with us at the History Centre if you'd like to help.

### *News from the papers...*

#### ***Jamestown Uniting church***

"Jamestown . . . already have no less than five churches, which, one must admit is excessive for a place of the population and present position of Jamestown. These are — Episcopalian, Rev. A. Spicer; Baptist, Rev. Stephen Howard; Presbyterian, Rev. A. Scales; Wesleyan, Rev. P. G. Thomas; Roman Catholic, Father Pallhuber" [Bunyip 21 Sep 1877]

#### ***Angle Vale Ebenezer Bible Christian church***

Mr. Keen always beat me in chapel building. When on the Gawler Plains, it was said that he kept foundation stones by him at the parsonage, and that when a few settlers bought land together Mr. Keen secured a site for a chapel. He would cart one of the stones to the site, and after laying the stone in position, he would jump upon it and shout 'Glory'." [Aust Christian Commonwealth 6 Oct 1905]

## A Sunday Morning Service at College Park Congregational Church, 1894

David Hilliard

For fourteen months in 1894–95 Adelaide's weekly paper *Quiz and the Lantern* published a series of articles titled 'Round the Churches'. These provide vivid, sometimes acerbic, descriptions of Sunday worship in a variety of Adelaide's city and suburban churches. In October 1894 the editor, Harry Evans, under the name of 'Quiz', attended a morning service at College Park Congregational Church to hear its new minister, John Walker Platt.

College Park Congregational Church was one of a cluster of Congregational churches that were founded in Adelaide's new suburbs in the latter decades of the nineteenth century: the others were at Medindie, Henley Beach, Rose Park, New Parkside (Unley) and Semaphore. The work at College Park was initiated in 1879 by the Congregational Union of South Australia (CUSA) which persuaded six 'gentlemen' to contribute 700 pounds towards a building. It was decided to build a stone church to seat 500 persons and costing £3070. The foundation stone was laid by Samuel Way, chief justice of South Australia. While the church was under construction a congregation was formed, with twenty-one members, on 2 February 1880. Within three years the membership had grown to 100.

The theological temper of the College Park Church, with its well-educated middle-class congregation, was distinctly liberal. Its second minister, J. Reed Glasson, had a high public profile in Adelaide as a preacher of 'social Christianity'. In 1893 he moved to Wellington, New Zealand, to become minister of The Terrace Congregational Church, a prestigious church close to Parliament House. He remained there for the next thirty years.

John Walker Platt, his successor, was born in Melbourne in 1857. In his twenties he trained for the ministry at the Congregational College in Melbourne while also studying at the University of Melbourne. He graduated in 1885 with a BA, then an MA, and was awarded the Bowen Prize for the best essay on English poetry of the nineteenth century. In May that year he married Ellen Beckett of South Melbourne. He then came with his new wife to South Australia where for several months he had an interim ministry at Brougham Place Congregational Church which was awaiting the arrival from England of the Rev. Samuel Hebditch. Platt quickly gained a reputation as an eloquent preacher. In June 1885 he was invited to take the pastorate of Kapunda Congregational Church. He was ordained at Kapunda on 5 November 1885. The chairman of the CUSA saw the appointment of

this scholarly minister with his well-cultivated mind as 'a distinct gain' to both the town and the whole colony.

After a good start Platt ran into trouble. In June 1887 a prominent member of the Kapunda Church announced that he would cease to attend because Platt was preaching doctrines that were, he claimed, 'at variance' with the truth and those found in the denomination's Declarations of Faith. Then Platt got into serious financial difficulties. He became caught up in a fever of speculation by investing (with borrowed money) in Barrier Mining. The market collapsed and he was left with heavy debts. For a minister, this was a huge disgrace. Platt resigned the pastorate in August 1888.

From Kapunda, Platt returned to Victoria where he was employed as a teacher in the Education Department. In August 1894 the College Park Church voted to invite him to take the vacant pastorate for three years, with an annual stipend of £200 (£50 less than his salary at Kapunda). Because of the 'unfavourable rumours' of his financial transactions at Kapunda, Platt had assured the church that he was repaying his creditors in full, that no one else had suffered in his financial failure, and that the experience had 'matured and deepened his moral nature'. However, his return posed a problem for some in the CUSA. As Platt had not been working as a minister in Victoria, he could not supply credentials from ministers or the Congregational Union of Victoria to be accepted as a personal member of the CUSA, as was required by its rules. The question of whether to accept Platt led to a heated debate at the meeting of the CUSA in October 1894, fully reported in Adelaide's newspapers, and the decision was deferred to the following year. When the CUSA met in October 1895, on the recommendation of a special committee, it was resolved unanimously, with cheers, that Platt be received into the Union. The chairman gave Platt 'the right hand of fellowship' and hoped that he would have 'many years of happy work at College Park'.

Here is the article as published in *Quiz and the Lantern*:

### THE REV. J. W. PLATT AT COLLEGE PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

A slightly built, pale-faced man, with arms like the sails of a windmill, a broad intellectual forehead, strong reddish hair, moustache, and beard, and eyes with an impediment in them, to use a figure of speech QUIZ once heard employed – such is the Rev. J. W. Platt, of the College Park Congregational Church, the man whom the Congregational Union very nearly succeeded in making a

martyr, and who, if he had not displayed a self-sacrifice somewhat rare in the cloth, might to-day have posed as a hero amongst the to-be-devoted worshippers at College Park.

He walks quietly up to the pulpit as the voluntary is played on a rather wheezy American organ – the church really ought to get a new box of music – and it is evident that he is not a man who adopts elegant postures. Perhaps he knows that he is not built in that way. Neither does he survey his congregation, which is large, and, as usual, is composed chiefly of women and children. (Where are the young men?) No; he flops into his seat, and appears to be collecting his thoughts. Perhaps his restless eyes are at work behind those glasses, for, although apparently only a man of thirty-five, he wears spectacles.

Mr. Platt is not a conventional parson in any sense of the term. He looks like a man who couldn't stand the curb. He impresses you with an idea that he is restless, impatient, that he sometimes fears his inability to attract, and that therefore ever and anon a special effort must be made to rivet attention. Yet, though this may be his manner, his matter is of the kind that cannot fail to be attractive. It is marked by the man's strong individuality. He is not strong himself by any means, and a little cough which troubles him now and again is not one of those things with which he can trifle with impunity.

When he prays he comes up to the railing of the platform, crosses his hands, and turns his head towards the northern windows. There is nothing perhaps startlingly original in the prayer. It is simple, and it seems to indicate that the speaker is only addressing a trusted friend. To put it colloquially, and without any intention of being blasphemous, it is as though he said, "Old fellow, there's a mighty power of trouble down here, and we want your help." Take this as an index to the service and you will get a fair idea of its tone. It is of an entirely confidential nature.

In reading the hymns Mr. Platt is somewhat disappointing. There is a tendency to sing-song. The preacher gets into his nasal tenor key and does not make due use of his deeper chest notes. Then, too, he has a habit of occasionally dropping his voice at the end of a sentence, but that is before he is thoroughly wound up

and set going. The congregation sang heartily, and QUIZ joined in all he knew. In doing so he made the discovery that whitewashing operations had recently been conducted in the church, and as he carried some of the whitewash away with him, he hastens to announce that he did not enter the church with any such nefarious design.

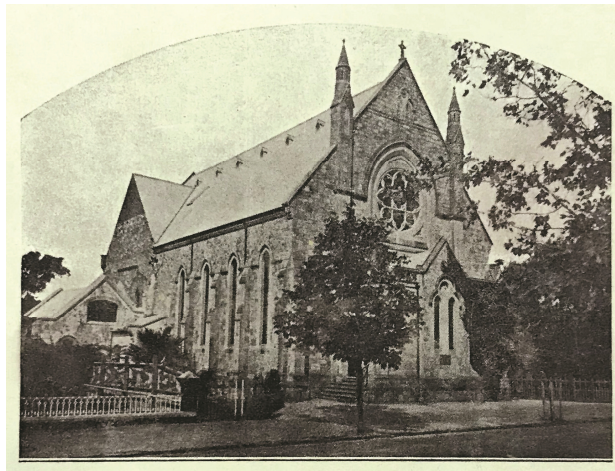
Unconventionality marks the Scripture readings. A verse or two having been read, an explanation is given in an easy colloquial style. The passage first selected is from Job, and though the words used are spoken of as "eternally true", the preacher says that "to make them live again you have to retranslate them into everyday speech and everyday thought". There is later on a passing reference to modern spiritualism in which the preacher seems to think there may be some little truth.

Mr. Platt's pronunciation is well nigh faultless. His delivery is marked, though not marred, by a slight sibilance. The emphasis is always correctly employed, and as the sermon is reached it is soon made manifest that one of Mr.

Platt's strong points is declamation, though he has the power which enables him to play on the heart strings of the people, as lowering his voice almost to a whisper he speaks of the loss of a wife, a child, or a dear friend.

Having read out his text he takes off his spectacles and quits the desk, nor does he return to it until he is closing his remarks. Not a single note, so far as it can be seen, does he use. He walks up and down his platform, now addressing the people on one side of the church; anon giving his attention to the other. Or he comes to a halt, leans confidentially over the railing, extends his index finger, and seemingly singles out one individual as the subject of his observation. This would be embarrassing under some circumstances, but the listener is too eager to allow his self-consciousness to obtrude itself. When the occasion demands it Mr. Platt throws back his head, raises his voice, and brings his clenched fist down on the railing.

An extempore speaker, he is one of those rarities who will bear fully reporting. QUIZ failed to find him tripping. There was not an inapposite word or phrase. He has a wealth of language on which to draw. One adjective is not a sufficient qualification for any term; he must use half a dozen, and they do not appear



superfluous. On the contrary they fall naturally on the ear. He has the oratorical trick of pausing in the middle of a sentence, but the effect produced does not strike one as being studied. The impression you get is that the preacher fears his volubility has carried him too far, that if he does not arrest it, his audience will miss the point.

Shakespeare has been read and re-read, and quotations from the Swan of Avon are frequent. They are not dragged in root and crop. They drop into their place like the stones in a piece of mosaic work. The descriptions are bold and vigorous; sometimes poetical. The phrase, "Oh, it's the way of the world", comes in for condemnation, for says, Mr. Platt, "a man is no more justified in blaspheming the world than he is blaspheming God. There is some good in all men. Some of them may never attend church, but in the average man there is more or less an element of good which requires to be laid hold upon. There are plenty of men who will compliment you, flatter you, and felicitate you on the good passages of your life, but when the day of trial comes they are weighed in the balances and found wanting."

"Life is a crucible," says Mr. Platt, "and I take it God is the Divine Artificer. A man who does not believe with Hamlet that 'there's a Divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them as we will', stands at a great disadvantage always. The Divine market is against him. He cannot buy and sell with advantage. A heavy weight is upon him He cannot run with alacrity and lightness. A man may disbelieve or doubt it, but he is crippled and maimed for life."

As the sermon is ending – it has occupied just 27 minutes – Mr. Platt goes to the desk and shuts the Bible with a loud report. Then he presses up to the railing, and in an earnest tone delivers his peroration. It is simple – merely a terse summing up of what has gone before. It possesses the power of oratory without suggesting the pretentiousness of an oratorical effort. There is nothing of cant about it; in fact cant terms are invariably eschewed.

Mr. Platt, having a vigorous intellect, brings freshness of thought to bear on the subject he discusses. His language is that of the original man. He clings to what he believes is the great central truth. Beyond that he seems to regard nothing as arbitrary. He would make all allowances for men who looked at life through different coloured spectacles to those he uses. A Christian with him would not be a mere creature of creed. As yet he has not developed himself to his College Park congregation. Fretful of the curb when employed by others he has yet set a curb on himself. But the restraint will not last long. A man such as he is cannot see the suffering of humanity and yet preach the gospel of contentment. When he does

expand the College Park church will not be large enough to contain all the people who will want to go there.

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Platt's ministry at College Park Church did not fulfil these expectations. He began with a flourish and quickly gained a reputation for his eloquence in the pulpit. During his ministry the 'wheezy American organ' was replaced by a new pipe organ. In May 1897, for reasons that are unclear, Platt asked to be relieved of his duties, claiming that he wanted to carry out a long thought-of plan to complete his studies in Europe. He left College Park in September. His wife Ellen died in Adelaide in May 1898. Platt then went to England, married Annie Taylor at Bamber Bridge in Lancashire in December 1899 (describing his occupation as 'gentleman') and was received into the Church of England. In May 1900 he was made deacon by the bishop of Worcester, and in December 1901 was ordained priest by the bishop of Rochester. He then held a succession of curacies (as a poorly paid assistant priest) at churches in various parts of England but for some reason he was never appointed to a parish of his own. It appears likely that he had a private income. For two years in 1906–1908 he was chaplain of the Anglican Church in Kobe, Japan. In 1927 he returned to Australia and held several temporary posts in rural parishes in the diocese of Goulburn until he retired in 1930. His last known address was in Holbrook, southern New South Wales. From then, he disappears from the accessible historical record but it is likely that that he died during the 1930s.

Platt's career illustrates a neglected stream in the ministry of all denominations: ministers with the early promise of a successful and fruitful ministry, then crises of various kinds, sometimes a switch to another denomination, a series of minor appointments and an obscure ending.

### Sources

*Christian Colonist*, 15 May 1885, p.5  
*Kapunda Herald*, 10 November 1885, p.3  
*Quiz and the Lantern*, 18 October 1894, p.8  
*South Australian Register*, 10 October 1894, pp.7, 11  
 October 1894, p.7, 15 October 1895, p.7  
 College Park Congregational Church and Sunday School, *Jubilee Souvenir, 1880–1930*  
 College Park Congregational Church records, State Library of South Australia, SRG 95/126  
 Kapunda Congregational Church records, State Library of South Australia, SRG 95/29  
 University of Melbourne Archives, J. W. Platt student card  
 Cable Clerical Index: <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/ccci/index.pdf>

## ***Open House Afternoon—Sunday 31 March***

About 28 people gathered at the History Centre for our Open House afternoon. A number of members of the Society came, as well as about 15 visitors. Many came with particular research requests and information quests.

We took the opportunity to display many of our unidentified photos that make up part of our collection, and were able to identify some of the people and events, thanks to those who came on the day.



(Photos: Rosemary Hocking)

### ***News from the papers...***

#### ***Strathalbyn St Andrew's Uniting church***

“ a very fine stained glass window was offered to the church, but the session declined to accept it owing to the figures being objected to, and it was returned to its donor! . . . The introduction of instrumental music in the services led to a good deal of friction, and some of the old Presbyterians hotly resented the innovation, a few leaving the church altogether, but the storm soon subsided.” [Southern Argus 8 Apr 1897]

### ***Beyond Armistice: How did we respond? 20 –24 May - Scots Church***



(Photos: Rosemary Hocking)

## 2019 Events

This year's program is jam-packed with interesting events and includes some that are being held in conjunction with other groups and organisations.



### **June 23 2019—Annual General Meeting**

(refer notice on page three of this newsletter)

### **August 8 2019—Aboriginal Missions: Neglect, Failure, Atonement and Legacy**

In association with *The Seminary of the Third Age*, Rev. Dr William Emilsen, Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University will be bringing this presentation.

When: 7:00pm  
Where: Effective Living Centre,  
26 King William Road, Wayville  
Cost: \$15  
Bookings: 8271 0329

### **Sunday 25 August—Presbyterians and the Uniting Church**

What is the significance of *Presbyterianism* as a form of ministry to the Uniting and Presbyterian Churches in Australia?

Join us as a panel of ministers and lay leaders from both traditions will reflect on its significance in the continuing life of their denominations.

*Presbyterianism* describes the Reformed Church's understanding of church and ministry. It is a form of church governance which is administered locally by the minister and a group of elected elders, and regionally and nationally by representative courts of ministers and elders. It is foundational to both traditions.

The panel discussion will be followed by afternoon tea with our hosts, Rev. Dr Peter Trudinger and Rev. David Houston.

When: 2:30pm—4:30pm  
Where: Scots Church Hall,  
237 North Terrace, Adelaide

### **Sunday 27 October—Theological exploration in Adelaide: recalling the contribution of Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian scholars**

Join us as Dr David Hilliard OAM, Research Fellow in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University presents a paper on the history of the Adelaide Theological Circle. Over its eighty-year history (1924—2005), scholars from each of our antecedent denominations were members. Other papers on individual theologians will be presented by members of our Historical Society.

The presentations will be followed by afternoon tea with our hosts, Dr David Hilliard and Dr Don Hopgood.

When: 2:30pm—4:30pm  
Where: Uniting College for Leadership and Theology  
312 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Brooklyn Park