

# Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 4 No. 1 March 2022



Greta -  
a  
prophet  
in the  
true  
biblical  
sense?

## A different point of view?

In the context of all the reporting about the tragedy in the Ukraine I read an article in *Disarming Times*, the newsletter of the Pax Christi society for March 2022, by Tony Kevin, who is a former Australian ambassador to Poland and Cambodia, and an emeritus fellow at Australian National University, and author of *Return to Moscow* (2017). After all the reporting in *The Age* and *The Guardian*, on television and from the Internet that was highly critical of Putin and Russia, I was surprised to discover that Kevin was prepared to argue, to some extent, the case for the Russian (or perhaps just Putin's and the inner circle of the Kremlin) point of view about the situation.

While I am not in a position to choose between the different arguments about the 'truth' of the situation and the different views expressed, it was a salutary reminder that the media can give, if not 'fake news', at least a one-sided view. What then happens to the writing of history, particularly if a view is taken that is not popular?

(Robert Renton)

## AGM and Webinar

The forthcoming Annual General Meeting of the Uniting Church National History Society will be held online via Zoom on 21 July 2022, between 4.00pm and 5.00pm Eastern Standard Time, followed by a public webinar, on 'History, Truth-Telling and the Uluru Statement from the Heart', commencing at 7.00pm.



Denise Bowden, CEO of Yothu Yindi, signing the statement

## History, Truth Telling, and the Uluru Statement from the Heart

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is framed in terms of a specific historical period - 'from the Creation, according to the common law from "time immemorial," and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.' This panel will bring together Indigenous leaders and historians to discuss the significance of this historical framing. They will explore the place of history and truth telling in working toward that Makarrata which is the 'coming together after a struggle' for the sake of a more just and self-determined future for First Nations people.



## Words from the President

I recently had the opportunity to participate in an online seminar with English Methodists to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Hugh Bourne (1772–1852), the founder of Primitive Methodism. PM ministers began arriving in the Australian colonies from the 1840s, and members who migrated were mostly from English mining and agricultural communities in the Midlands and the North, as well as from Cornwall in the West. The places of origin were mapped onto the new country, as those from mining communities in Britain usually settled in the coalfields and those from the countryside found homes in rural areas.

In keeping with the attitude of other Minor Methodists and Dissenting bodies, the Primitive Methodists decided to reject state aid whether in cash or land, wishing to stand on a principle of independency. Primitive Methodists supported land reform and protective tariffs in the Victorian goldfield towns and were extensively involved in local government. At Eaglehawk, near Bendigo, many of the members of the large Primitive Methodist congregation were Cornish miners (by one estimate, almost half the miners in the Bendigo area were Cornish).

Early Primitive Methodist missionaries and their wives often had incredible expectations thrust upon them by the sending church. Lack of progress was almost always read as a result of a lack of dedication. Any minister who failed to win souls was to be 'reckoned as uncredentialed and treated accordingly.' They were told that their bodies and souls did not belong to themselves but to the Primitive Methodist Church. This may seem romantic and noble in the annals of missionary biography, but it must have been an unhealthy, stress-inducing way to live. Little wonder, perhaps, that of the 75 ministers who served the Primitive Methodist Church in South Australia between 1844 and 1900, thirty resigned from the ministry.

As in Britain, Primitive Methodists in the colonies had a role to play in supporting the workers movement. In the 1890s, trade union leaders were sometimes invited to speak at the Annual Conference. The Rev. Hugh Gilmore, the popular (and liberal) preacher of Wellington Square Primitive Methodist Church, Adelaide, supported striking dock workers and his son, Hugh Jr. became State President of the Labor Party in the years before the Great War. Of course, there were also more politically conservative Methodists, Whatever position they held on the political spectrum, all were driven by the practical question of how to apply the Gospel to human need.

Primitives and Bible Christians kept up camp meetings and revival measures longer than other Methodists, but lengthy periods of revival were the lifeblood of most Methodist hopes, plans, and successes throughout the nineteenth century. Commitment to revival did not always mean a lack of progressive thought in theology. Primitive Methodists were often at the forefront in theological developments and in what came to be known as 'the Social Gospel'. One sometimes hears the argument that Wesleyans were more theologically liberal while the Minor Methodists, because committed to revivalism, were more conservative. This is a simplistic and inaccurate analysis. The dispute over Modernism was an intra-Methodist problem, not one that played out on denominational lines.

In January 1902 the Primitive Methodists merged with Wesleyans, Bible Christians and United Free Methodists to form the Methodist Church of Australasia. In the end, Methodist union was more an absorption of the Minor Methodists than a true union, and Wesleyans gave up far less than any other body. Wesleyan funds, properties, newspapers and archives were continued unaltered. The Constitution of the new church was essentially Wesleyan with small concessions such as the involvement of laypeople in stationing.

In 1790, James Crowfoot declared, "Fellow labourers, wherever there is an open door, enter in and preach the Gospel: if it be to two or three, under a hedge or a tree, preach the Gospel; go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind...this is the way the primitive Methodists did it". This was the model (and the name) that Hugh Bourne adopted, and it was the model that was continued in the Australian colonies. Both the Primitive Methodist social conscience and its commitment to evangelism continue to be carried forward in the DNA of the Uniting Church, even if the latter often functions as a recessive gene.

Yours, 

(Associate Professor Rev. Glen O'Brien)

For a full copy of the presentation of which this short column is a summary, please email [glenaobrien@gmail.com](mailto:glenaobrien@gmail.com)

## John Dunmore Lang and colonisation

Dr Barry Bridges



John Dunmore Lang was not just a religiously motivated social worker of an essentially uncomplicated practical outlook as was his contemporary, Caroline Chisholm, whose work, incidentally, was in many respects anticipated by his. At the back of his immigration work lay a solid and coherent doctrine

which set for him the principles upon which colonisation should proceed. The purpose of this paper is to outline that theoretical base.

To begin with Lang was a Biblical fundamentalist in the fullest sense. The Bible had the answer to every question in life and he shut his mind to any form of criticism or non-literal interpretation of that book. To him, the command in the book of Genesis "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (1:28) was a God-given order which a Christian could ignore only at his peril. Thus population control was a sin, the having of children a virtue. The inevitable redundant population would then migrate to one of the waste areas of the earth, such as Australia, to carry on the process. "Christian colonisation is beyond all comparison the best means of Christianising the world". Lang's various discussions of this point make it quite clear, however, that Catholics cannot be regarded as Christians and that the numerical defeat of them through colonial multiplication is an important consideration. His anti-Catholicism is very important in connection with his immigration work.

As the leading Protestant country of Europe Britain had been specially called to the "heroic work" of promoting Protestant Christian colonisation but in Lang's view had failed miserably and betrayed the cause of the Reformation for imperialism. Nevertheless, Lang was anxious to see Britain or some other Protestant power annexe and colonise the islands of the Pacific and saw this as ideally the

natural destiny of an independent Australia. He claimed credit for the establishment of New Zealand as a dependency of NSW in 1840, although the House of Commons had rejected a bill for the colonisation of those islands in 1838.

There is certainly ambivalence and seems to be some inconsistency in Lang's comments on the role of government in colonisation, for despite his condemnation of British government he says elsewhere that the propagation of Christianity has been used in the past as a convenient pretext for European powers seeking to gratify their lust of empire through colonisation. The propagation of Christianity is certainly *not* a legitimate object of colonisation for any government—"Governments are instituted for the protection and furtherance of the temporal interests of their subjects: they have nothing to do with the concerns of eternity".

Britain had gone astray through her "unhallowed lust of empire"—a sin of pride. Imperialism was akin to Popery and the Secretary of State for Colonies was a Political Pope in London. This was inconsistent with personal liberty and Protestantism, and the British Empire was doomed to dismemberment in the very near future. Divine Providence had set its face against anything like a universal empire since the fall of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, the "national dereliction of duty towards the poor in the land, for whom this vast colonial empire is held in trust, necessarily precedes a fall. It cannot but be peculiarly offensive in the eyes of the Great Governor of the nations". This interpretation is pure determinism. His unconcern with what happens when there is nowhere left to colonise is explained simply by his millenarianism.

Lang believed that it was both the law of nature and the ordinance of God that colonies should be entirely independent. Hence, the word 'colony' refers to people only and not to territory, to the relationship of the immigrant settlers to their place of origin, not to any lasting subjection of them and their new land to the state from which they came.

To any man of a rightly constituted mind, there can be no earthly equivalent for freedom or self-government. To a community entitled to the blessing of self-government there can be no earthly equivalent for national independence.

The man who can submit willingly, and without the direst necessity, to the deprivation of his personal freedom is a slave at heart. The community entitled to self-government that can willingly submit to a condition of political dependence, when it might otherwise obtain its entire political freedom and national independence is utterly unworthy of a place and a name among the nations of the earth.

Throughout his book, *The Coming Event*, projecting the independence and federation of the Australian colonies, Lang uses the analogy of the parent and child that has reached its majority. Parting for independent life is natural and is not accompanied by acrimony or loss of affection unless an effort is made to keep the offspring in unnatural subjection—as was done in the case of the American colonies. A colony attains its political majority whenever it both able and willing to manage its own affairs, and to guide and govern itself, without either assistance or protection from the parent state. When this time has come is for the colony to decide and any parent state which resists this “is resisting the divine ordinance, and is acting unreasonably and tyrannically”.

It was Lang's firm conviction that the ancient Greeks had mastered the art of migration and colonisation and that the British would not succeed in doing their duty until they learnt from the example of this heathen people. He pointed to the fact that the Greeks usually respected the right of the migrants to immediate independence, with the result that the mother state and the colony retained close bonds of affection, culture and religion and gave mutual aid in time of war. On the other hand, attempts to assert the dominance of the founding state bred ill-will and conflict. With the founding of the colony of Virginia in the reign of Charles I constitutional rights had been granted and extended to subsequent settlements. But the British were motivated later by their lust for empire, the extent of colonisation in terms of populating power was ‘humiliating’ in Lang's view, and the attempts made by British monarchs to reduce the colonial freedoms had led to the colonists taking their rights by the War of Independence. From that time until the reforms consequent upon the Durham Report British colonial policy was even more oppressive in that new colonies were not given any constitutional

rights. He explained the great progress in populating the independent USA by reference to the extension of full political rights to the new territories being settled. At the peak of the gold rushes in 1852 87,000 people came to Australia, only 33,563 went to British North America, but 224,000 went to the USA.

Lang saw the talk of the benefits and blessings of belonging to the British Empire as being “either the sheerest cant or the grossest delusion”, or, worse still, an artifice of the devil—

to extend and perpetrate human misery, by setting men's minds and hearts against the adoption of those beautiful and perfect arrangements, which the All-wise and beneficent Creator established, for the welfare and advancement of society in this lower world.

Neither did he accept that the Australian colonies were under any obligation to Britain, for they had received the convicts Britain unloaded on them and found homes for redundant population. Britain could not really defend her colonies, while their ties with her were an incitement to enemy powers to attack the colonies. Both Britain and her colonies would gain from colonial independence; Britain would have fewer defence obligations, the colonies fewer enemies.

Consistent with these views, Lang also opposed church imperialism and fought against the Church of Scotland's claim to jurisdiction over colonial presbyteries.

As a natural result of his passion for individual freedom and political rights Lang was a federalist, for through federalism these rights could be maximised in the small colony or state without precluding the establishment of the larger national unit needed for viability in the modern world. He led the movements for the separation of Victoria and Queensland, inveighed against the illogicality of their boundaries, and envisaged the creation of more states and development of the north which have not eventuated. *The Coming Event* spells out his views on an Australian federation. As things were, because of petty jealousies between the colonies, he believed it essential that Britain should federate them before granting independence, but he was strongly opposed to Earl Grey's plan for federation because the

colonies had not been consulted, and because of his extreme antipathy towards the Governor General, Sir Charles Fitz Roy.

For Lang a free and federated Australia could only be a republic. This was a settled point, not as a result of reasoning from abstract principles, but from necessity in the present circumstances and the condition of the civilised world. He pointed to the century of successful republican government of the people of the same origin in the USA, and to the fact that even before the Reform Acts Charles James Fox had said that Britain was a “disguised republic”. This being so, it is nevertheless true that Lang was convinced republican on doctrinal grounds. Biblical quotations were drawn upon to demonstrate that republican government was that given by God to his chosen people in the commonwealth of ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 7:14–20; Numbers 26:1–4 and 51–56; Leviticus 25:8–10; and Joshua 18:2–6). Three fundamental principles emerged from his study of Biblical republicanism: universal suffrage, perfect political equality, and popular election. Significantly, he states explicitly that he does not advocate female suffrage because he can find no Biblical warrant for it.

Republican government was the only form of human government ever divinely established on earth. God, through his accredited minister, had protested against the unwarranted setting aside of the republic of Israel for the monarchy. Monarchy existed, according to Lang, by *divine permission*, republicanism by *divine appointment* (Samuel 8:4–9).

Thus, as a result of his interpretation of the religious fundamentalist position, Lang was both a republican and democrat. Late in life he protested: “I am no Communist or Socialist, although any man who honestly advocates the cause of the people, whether at home or abroad, will be subjected to that reproach”.

Republican and democratic views then had attached to them the same irrational and emotional rejection as virtually treasonable doctrines that one now finds directed against communism. This partly explains why one finds Lang regularly reviled in much of the contemporary press, yet with equal regularity

strongly supported in political polls. His democratic outlook made him the darling of the masses and remote settlements.

One other lesson which could be learned from Greek colonisation was the advantage of some more settled and directed plan than the mere export of redundant individuals. Greek colonising parties were a microcosm of the old society.

In the case of the Greeks, men of all ranks in society, of all professions and occupations, went forth on the great undertaking, and staked their character and fortunes on the issue; but they all went forth from the same mother-city or state, and they were all perfectly well acquainted with each other before they started on their noble undertaking ... every Greek emigrant found himself on his arrival in his adopted country in the midst of his old neighbours and countrymen and friends. They all left the same locality in the *old* country and they all settled together in the *new*.

This is relevant to Lang’s attempts at group settlement and his provision of ministers and teachers. The general British system, however, was the migration of people who had either failed or were about to fail in life at home, gathered from all quarters of the three kingdoms at the port of embarkation to disperse again among utter strangers on arrival in the colony. The emigration from Britain of the full range of classes and abilities to be found among the population and the transportation to a colony of the whole tree of English society as advocated by Bishop Hinds, Charles Buller, and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, and readily accepted in Britain, was seen by Lang to be based on ignorance. Differing ability and vocational groups were needed but the socio-economic fabric was not transportable, as was proved at great cost in Western Australia.

In 1833 Lang enunciated four chief principles for an immigration policy:

1. Careful selection to ensure the right type.
2. Passage money should be cut to a minimum, advanced to immigrants and repaid out of earnings within a reasonable time after arrival.
3. Those who come at their own cost should be entitled to a remission on the purchase of

Crown land equal to the cost of passage for the whole family.

4. The scheme should be financed by proceeds from the sale of Crown land.

He also thought it desirable that:

5. The migrants come in a group and settle in a group with their own ministers and schoolmasters to preserve moral restraints.

Subsequently, he added:

6. Migrants to be drawn equally (i.e. proportionately) from the three kingdoms.

7. The organisation of a voluntary employment agency.

8. The establishment of an agricultural college for receiving and training migrants.

Lang's own practice conformed to these principles as much as officialdom permitted. He was an advocate of small-scale yeoman agricultural settlement, both because agriculture permits a greater population density and because he was at one with many contemporaries in seeing concentration as necessary for the provision of religious ministration and the preservation of civilisation. For him it was also a means of reducing the reliance on convict labour which prevailed under the squatting system and a reflection of his dislike of servility. However, his idea in 1833 that 20–50 acres would be sufficient for a farm and later for 80 acre cotton farms was unrealistic.

Caroline Chisholm shared this outlook and with him opposed the squatters' ambition to tie up the land. Both saw family immigration and settlement as essential to the preservation of the Aborigines whose women were the prey of isolated and women-hungry convict station hands.



## Visit of James Rowe to Woods Point 1871

### Travis McHarg

(From the *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society Synod of Victoria and Tasmania* for December 2001, Vol. 8, No. 2)

In the 19th century, and later, Methodism observed great annual festivals, not the liturgical calendar variety which have now descended on us, but Chapel and Sunday school anniversaries and mission services. These were celebrated with special preaching and large tea meetings with bountiful table and numerous speakers. For these great gatherings visiting speakers were a valued ingredient. Given that travel on colonial Victorian roads was often fraught with difficulties, if not danger to life and limb, Chairmen or District Superintendents were surprisingly frequent visitors to even remote chapels. A good example of such visits from 'minor' Methodism is the Bible Christian District Superintendent James Rowe visiting Woods Point, as the deputationist for colonial missions, in November 1871,

James Rowe was born in Penzance (an appropriate location for the largely Cornish Bible Christians) in 1824. Entering the Bible Christian ministry in 1845, he came to South Australia on the *Anna Maria*, in 1850. After service in South Australia including Burra Burra, Koorunga and Adelaide he came to Victoria in 1859, becoming District Superintendent on creation of the Victorian District in 1860. He served at Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat before returning, by invitation and at own request, to Moonta in SA in 1877. For all but two of his 17 years in Victoria he was Bible Christian District Superintendent.

Wood's Point following the discovery of gold reached a population of 20,000 in the 1860s, declining to 1,000 in the 1870s.

Wood's Point circuit was almost certainly their most remote and physically challenging circuit. It had Bible Christian ministerial appointments from 1866 to 1874 when it was left without appointment. The society continued for a few years until finally closing. At the time of the visit the Bible Christian minister, John William Blamey, had been stationed there for almost two years and

'commercial depression [was] at present reigning throughout the community'.

His account of the visit

"Geographical

Wood's Point is situated in one of the narrow ravines of the Australian Alps, with a street cut at the foot of one range of hills, and with the river Goulbourn meandering at the base of the other range; and is about one hundred and twenty miles north-east of Melbourne...

Journey

I set out by coach from Melbourne, Nov, 21st, 1871, at five pm, travelled all night, and reached Marysville at five am the next morning. Took breakfast and started on horseback at six am, and arrived at the point at eight pm, being twelve hours in the saddle, and two hours for dinner and rest. The tediousness of the journey was relieved by an agreeable travelling companion. I returned by coach the whole distance from the point to Melbourne, and was the only passenger until we reached Marysville. To persons not accustomed to travelling the journey is fearful, and I may state that it was the roughest I ever had. On my first journey to Camperdown, several years ago, the coach travelled over eight miles of stony rises, and I have a distinct recollection of being tossed to the roof of the coach and falling on my seat to break it in two; but the journey to the Point involves the going over *forty* miles [Marysville to Wood's Point] of the roughest road I ever travelled. The ascents and descents were not so difficult as I had expected to find them, as in some places the track is cut into the sides of the ranges, and in others it runs along their summits, but the thickness of the growing trees, the large logs lying on the ground, the mud holes, many feet in depth, with stones and roots of trees concealed, made the jolting something fearful to think of. I grasped the perpendicular rails of the coach and held fast until my poor hands became sore and swollen, and even then I was jerked from side to side until my hat was crushed and skull endangered. I kept my teeth clenched for fear of biting my tongue in two. On returning one of the leading horses staggered in a mud-hole and pulled the other leading horse down also. The poor animals

### Current UCNHS Board members

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Rev. Dr Julia Pitman (Queensland)

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Dr Judith Raftery (Secretary) (South Australia)

Rev. Steve Orme (Northern Territory)

Mr Bob Coote (Treasurer) New South Wales

Pastor Richard La'Brooy (New South Wales)

Pastor Lauren Merritt (Northern Territory)

Rev. Robert Renton (Editor) (Victoria)

### NEW TREASURER NEEDED!

**Bob is retiring at the end of June and we hope to be able to hear from a volunteer! Please contact our President, Glen O'Brien, at [glenaobrien@gmail.com](mailto:glenaobrien@gmail.com).**

### IAMS 2022 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE - UPDATE

<https://missionstudies.org/>

The 15th General Assembly of the International Association of Mission Studies will be convened and meet on 7–11 July 2022, at Morling College, Sydney. The conference theme will be "Powers, vulnerabilities, and marginalities: mission in a wounded world", and members are invited to submit papers as part of the five-day programme. Many will be able to access major presentations and conference proceedings online.

The AAMS Executive committee has appointed a local support group to assist and liaise with the International Executive. Members include Peter Wilkinson, Xiaoli Yang, Dean Eland and Darrell Jackson. The local committee will focus on hospitality and invite others to join in and share their interest and expertise.

Dean Eland: [djeland@bigpond.com](mailto:djeland@bigpond.com)

struggled hard to regain their proper position, but without success, for they became so exhausted and entangled in the harness that they settled down in the mud and were all but buried. I sat on the box-seat of the coach and held the pole horses with the reins, while the driver went into the fearful vortex and liberated the horses. We got out without injury. Reader if you ever saw a mastiff shake a small dog, you have some notion of the dreadful tumbling I had for forty miles - minus the bite.

Perambulations

*Thursday*, the day after my arrival at the Point, I rested from my pilgrimage.

The *following day* I accompanied Bro. Blamey in visiting several members of his flock, and engaged in conversation and prayer.

On *Saturday* Bro. B. and self started on horseback for the Golden Bar to see some of our members. On returning, we climbed a very steep hill to see another member, a Mr Roberts the manager of a claim situated nearly on the summit of the hill, but did not find him at home. The ascent was difficult in places, having to climb and pull our horses after us; and the descent was dangerous, for some of the cuttings were both narrow and rough and are on the edges of gulfs many hundreds of feet in depth and almost perpendicular. To add to my bewilderment, my poor horse was blind in the eye nearest the danger - the least slip and both man and horse would have been dashed in pieces. When Bro. Blamey told me the hill is called "Never Mind", I replied that I did mind.

On the *Sunday* I preached two sermons at the Point on behalf of our missionary society, and had good congregations and good collections. I was delighted with the attention that the congregation gave to the Word of Life.

On *Monday* Bro. B. and self started on another visiting tour on horseback, and called on several families. Bro. B. took me on another *narrow* cutting with a fearful gulf on my right hand. It struck me that my friend had made up his mind to show me his most difficult and dangerous tracks, and lifting up my head I saw he was laughing heartily. After we got out of danger I

**Future date claimer**

## ***4<sup>th</sup> Uniting Church National History Conference***

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August to Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2023**

**The conference will begin on Thursday evening and conclude on Sunday afternoon.**

**It will be held in Darwin, Northern Territory.**

**The theme for the conference is:**

### ***Truth Telling: from Colonising to Covenanting***

**Look for further details in future issues of our newsletter.**

**Plan to come and participate,**

**then stay to explore the Top End in the dry season.**

said I did not feel so timid as I did on Saturday, when he replied, "this is the most dangerous place in the district." I had his confession that I had travelled the most dangerous place, which I thought was a feat for one unaccustomed to the alps, and I did not forget to make capital out of it. Some of the friends were astonished when we told them we had travelled on this track and said, 'no person ever comes that way on horseback'. In the evening I attended the public missionary meeting, which was addressed by the Episcopalian minister [Rev F Cahill], Bro. Blamey, Messrs R Guy and J Sennett [James Sennett Post and Telegraph Master] local preachers, and myself, chair taken by Mr J Carter [senior circuit steward]. [Mr Sennett reported that Mr Rowe was 'greeted with long and continuous applause' and 'was in his usual happy mood and treated his hearers to a speech redolent of profound thought and deep philosophy, and full of energy.'] The meeting was moderately attended. The *next day* Bro. B. and self started for Gaffney's Creek, distant twelve miles from the Point, which we reached about noon. We got refreshment and visited several families. We were hospitably

entertained - had our coats decorated with the flowers of the Alps, and made arrangements to conduct services in the Primitive Methodist Church, said people having retired from the district. Returned to the Point about six pm weary but much delighted.

*Wednesday morning* started in company with Bro. B. for Kelly's Hill - the highest summit in the district, distant from Wood's Point about seven miles around the cutting, but not near so far the way the crow flies. On reaching the summit I should think we had a landscape of one hundred miles in circumference, and we supposed we saw snow on a hill in the distance. This ended my perambulations at the Point."

Mr Rowe concludes that he was treated with great kindness, presumably being convinced that Brother Blamey had not actually been trying to kill him. He noted that Blamey "has a rough country to travel over - a poor house to live in - and very poor furniture", perhaps in keeping with the dwellings of many of his members. The BC cause had prospered under Blamey and the superintendent was impressed with his standing in his Church and among the other Churches. The meetings in aid of Colonial missions raised £22.

## **The Methodist Union of the Wesleyan, Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, and the United Free Methodists in Victoria in 1902**

.....  
The late **Rev. Bill Gillard** wrote this paper on information gleaned from *The Spectator* reports of February and March 1902, the Report of the Great Methodist Union Demonstration June 19 1895, the Methodist Union Report issued by the Federal Council in 1898, the Minutes of the Union Demonstration Committee of 1901 and 1902, and *A Century of Victorian Methodism* by the Rev. Sir Irving Benson.

.....  
In 1791, a month before he died, John Wesley reminded the people called Methodist of the need for unity: "Lose no opportunity of declaring to all that the Methodists are one people in all the world, and that it has through faith the determination so to continue."

### **Uniting Church National History Society Newsletter**

Contributions to this newsletter are welcome, but please send them via email and in MS Word or Apple Pages format only.

Editor: Robert Renton  
([robert.renton@bigpond.com](mailto:robert.renton@bigpond.com))

### **A note from the treasurer**

Dear members,

Many thanks to all those many members who promptly renewed their memberships. When renewing could you please include your name and initial in the reference section of your BSB bank transfer.

A \$25 deposit was made on 23 Feb at Malvern Victoria. I would really like to credit this against your membership. An email to me would be appreciated. Many thanks, Bob Coote Treasurer, UCNHS [bandybc@gmail.com](mailto:bandybc@gmail.com)

A reminder that membership fees have been set at \$25 as from 1 January 2021.

If you are sending a cheque please write the society name in full on the cheque "Uniting Church National History Society" This is a request from my friendly bank teller. Post to The Treasurer PO Box 2 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782.

A reminder about bank transfer details

BSB: 032-828

ACCOUNT NO.: 301985

ACCOUNT NAME: Uniting Church National History Society.

Don't forget to put your own name on the transfer so we know you have paid!



Unfortunately, this was not to be the case because after Wesley's death there were numerous secessions from the original body whom the Wesleyan Methodists claimed to represent. There were five groups represented in Australia – the Wesleyan Methodists, the Methodist New Connection (formed 1799), the Primitive Methodists (formed 1810), the Bible Christians (formed in 1815), and the United Methodist Free Churches (formed 1857). Each of these churches established their missions in Australia and New Zealand, and in many situations competed with each others for adherents. The differences between them were not doctrinal, according to Sir Samuel Way, but to do with questions of church government.

#### A spirit of unity

A spirit of unity was spreading abroad in Australia in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1866 the Rev. George Daniel moved a resolution in the Wesleyan Conference of Victoria and Tasmania in favour of union, but he failed to get a seconder.

In 1888 the Methodist New Connection, realising the futility of struggling on as a small denomination in Australia, united with the Wesleyan Methodists in Victoria and with the Bible Christians in South Australia.

In the period 1892-94, the General Conference and the various state Conferences agreed to the establishment of Federal Councils to create the basis for union. A Basis of Union was adopted by the Wesleyan General Conference which was held in Adelaide in 1894. The Rev. Dr W. H. Fitchett led the debate in favour of the union, and between 1897 and 1898, each of the various churches in each state in Australia agreed to union. Some were slower than others, including the Wesleyans of Victoria and Tasmania.

#### The Great Methodist Union Demonstration

In 1895 Dr Fitchett, who was then President of the Wesleyan Conference, organised a "Great Public Demonstration" in favour of the union of the various Methodist groups. Two and a half thousand people crowded into Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street, with many unable to get in. The acting Governor of Victoria, Sir John Madden, was in the chair, and Sir Samuel Way, Governor of

South Australia and a staunch member of the Bible Christians, made a "most moving and splendid speech in support of union (resulting in many cheers and 'hear-hears')." On the completion of this speech, Dr Fitchett rose to his feet and moved a resolution supporting union and received the backing of the great majority in the church.

With the vote taken in each church by 1898, the Federal Council issued its report in the form of a booklet headed and introduced as follows &

#### METHODIST UNION

##### Method of Consummation and Interim Arrangements 1898

Dear Friends,

It is our pleasing duty to inform you that on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1902 the organic union of the Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist, The Bible Christian, and the United Methodist Free Churches will be consummated in Victoria and Tasmania. Our Churches, which have been one in doctrine, in the means of Christian grace and methods of Christian work, will from that date be one in Church government....

The Victorian Government, with the support of the Opposition, in 1898 supported the "Methodist Union" bill and made union legally possible, and in the terminology of the day enabled the "consummation of union" to take place.

#### The first Conference

The next and important step was the meeting of the first Victoria and Tasmania Conference of the Methodist Church of Australia in Wesley Church Melbourne, from Tuesday 25 February to Friday 9 March 1902.

The Conference commenced at 9.30 am with a United Prayer Meeting held in the Conference Hall, followed by an official opening at 10.30 am. The Rev. A. R. Edgar, who was the out-going President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference and also superintendent minister of Wesley Central Mission, presided over the business of choosing the first President of the new church. The Rev. Dr W. H. Fitchett was elected

President, gaining 289 votes (his nearest rival gaining only 45 votes).

In the meantime, much work had gone into preparing agendas, debates, speeches, celebrations, demonstrations and choirs. Dr E. H. Sugden, the Master of Queen's College, featured prominently in the musical aspects of the celebrations. In February 1902 Dr Sugden had written to *The Spectator* in preparation for the music...

It is proposed by the Methodist Federal Council to form a choir of 1000 voices to lead the singing in the Exhibition Building at the President's Reception on Monday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The Hallelujah Chorus and a number of Hymns will be sung.... (Edward H. Sugden, Conductor)

These were some of the special events of the Conference:

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup>: Sunday School Union of Methodist Young People – Tea Meeting (6d) and Celebration, with Special Addresses by representatives of the former Churches, A. R. Edgar (Wesleyan), J. H. Cain (Primitive Methodists), W. E. Secomb (Bible Christians), G. W. Harrison (United Methodist Free Church).

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup>: Home Mission Tea and Meeting in the Town Hall.

Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup>: Twentieth Century Fund Business.

Friday 28<sup>th</sup>: Conference Love Feast.

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March: SUNDAY SCHOOL MARCH AND DEMONSTRATION IN THE EXHIBITION BUILDING, MELBOURNE. All Sunday School children to assemble at Princes Bridge Yarra Bank at 1.45 pm and led by two brass bands march to the Exhibition Building by 3 pm. Children to carry flags and wear sashes and rosettes of various colours. United Free Methodists – pale blue; Primitive Methodists – red; Bible Christians – orange; Wesleyan Methodists – royal blue.

It was hoped that 10,000 children would march, and about 8,000 did. The Exhibition Building was so crowded that many of the children couldn't find a seat and had to sit with legs dangling over the edge of the official platform.

Dr Sugden prepared a special "Song of Union" in which the various verses were sung by the



God, breath and source of life, in love you called the world into being and in grace you made us and call us your children. We stand in awe of the world's beauty and wildness; complexity and power; resilience and fragility.

God of life, you call us to be nurtured by the planet; to be nurturing of the planet; to cherish the world and all that lives. But we have failed and the world groans under our weight.

God of love, we pray for those people, communities and nations already suffering the devastating effects of climate change; and we pray for the diversity of life on earth.

God of hope, we pray for the members of parliament. Bless them with wisdom and creativity, and a shared vision of hope for all creation. May they find the determination to take strong action to halt the destructive effects of climate change, and the political will to act together for the common good.

Creator God, we pray for us all, that we might restore our relationships with each other and work together to heal the earth. Renew us in your grace for the sake of your creation. Amen.

different traditions with flags held high. It was reported, "Finally, during the last verse of the song a large white flag was raised with the word 'Christian' on it, and we all knew what that meant." This was the last verse:

*May the day come quickly  
When all Christian men,  
In the love of Jesus  
Shall be one again.  
One in hope and doctrine,  
One in charity,  
Other names forgotten,  
Christians let us be.*

After the last verse was sung, the audience broke out into hurrahs, and there were also hurrahs for Dr Sugden and for Major Rigg, who had been the marshal-in-chief. Then everyone sang the final hymn, *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*, followed by the National Anthem.

The railways gave concession fares to all the children attending the Demonstration.

The report in *The Spectator* of March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1902 (p. 366) read as follows.

Beyond all question, the crown of the Conference gatherings was the great **Union Thanksgiving Demonstration in the Exhibition Building**. The Demonstration was preceded by a Tea well catered for by Mr Passfield. 1500 sat down for the meal, and 5000 attended the Meeting.

The President held a reception after the Tea and his right hand must have ached from the many grips to which it responded.

A great United Choir presented a most beautiful spectacle in the orchestra, and sang delightfully under the baton of the indefatigable Master of Queen's. Mr Mansley Green accompanied them on the organ.

All the space in the Concert Hall was filled long before the appointed time, and at half-past seven the President, the Rev. Dr Fitchett, accompanied by the ex-President, the Rev. A. R. Edgar, came upon the platform and were loudly cheered.

The President gave out "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing" as the first hymn, to the tune, though despised by musicians, which is dear to the Methodist heart.

Prayer was offered by the Rev. W. Williams and then came "All hail the power of Jesu's name", sung gladly by the choir and the great congregation.

Telegrams of congratulations were read from the South Australian and New Zealand Conferences on the consummation of Methodist Union in Victoria. Also one from the Rt Honourable Samuel Way, Chief Justice of South Australia, who sends his hearty congratulations and regrets that his duties as Chief Justice prevent him from being present.

Then followed two great Union addresses, one by the President and the other by the Rev. S. T. Withington [see page 367 of *The Spectator*, 14 March 1902].

**The President:** "God is turning over a new page in our History. He is writing great things upon it – greater things than any former page has borne. With God's help we have healed the scars of our divisions by gathering our broken fragments together into one great Methodist Church in Australia." [Loud applause] "This Union of ours is noted as a great event by many leaders beyond our borders. A leading Catholic gentleman in our City [here a wretched little dog gave vent to a howl of anguish], a man who is held in honour by us all – I won't tell you his name because I don't know what Archbishop Carr might say about it – the gentleman stopped me in the street and congratulated me. 'I wish,' said he, 'that all the churches would do what you have done.' Thank God for what has been done. If John Wesley were here tonight he would say, *The best of all is God is with us*."

After the successful completion of the First Conference of the Methodist Church in Victoria and Tasmania held in February and March of 1902, the final step necessary for the consolidation of Methodist union could now be undertaken by the passing of the Validating Act by the Victorian Parliament.

