

# Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 5 No. 4 December 2023

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## From the Chair: Dr Judith Raftery

I imagine that many readers of this newsletter are, as I am, stunned and deeply saddened by the comprehensive failure of the recent referendum on recognising First Nations people in Australia's constitution and creating an Indigenous Voice to parliament. Many of you will have been asking, as I have been, 'What do we do now and where do we go to from here'? An answer that has been emerging clearly from Indigenous Australians is "We need to focus on truth-telling. We need to tell the truth about our history". To the extent that this answer suggests that 'the truth' has not been told, or not told loudly or clearly enough, and that that is why the referendum failed to get traction with Australian voters invites scrutiny on at least two counts.

- Firstly, other evidence that is readily available suggests that the referendum failed not because voters weren't apprised of 'the truth', but because in its specific formulation, though not in its underlying premise, the referendum proposal failed to achieve bi-partisan political support. In Australia, referenda that don't achieve such support always fail.
- Secondly, it is not true to say that 'truth telling' has been absent or in short supply. There are many works of historical analysis, from all around Australia, that tell the truth of a process of colonisation that, in various combinations of ignorance, neglect, greed, brutality, complacency, intention, self-justification, theft, and a complex sense of racial entitlement have meant death, misery, dispossession, degradation, cultural deformation, inter-generational trauma and voicelessness for many First Nations people. They also tell the truth of Indigenous pride, courage, resistance and ongoing agency in the face of this onslaught.

Why, then, are we now being told that the need for 'truth telling' is urgent? In large part it is surely because much of the 'truth-telling' to date has been academic—which in no way diminishes its veracity or value, or stops it from allowing Indigenous voices to emerge from the historical record or from current political struggles—but it does limit its reach. Even academic histories which have attracted widespread attention beyond academia, for example Henry Reynolds' many forays into truth telling, or more 'grass roots' work such as Christobel Mattingley's and Ken Hampton's, *Survival in Our Own Land*, or frank government reports such as *Bringing Them Home*, have not led to the truth of our history being widely understood, let alone cared about, by those who have benefited from it at the expense of First Nations people.

What can be done about this? It seems to me that the truth is unlikely to be really heard or taken seriously until it becomes personal and local. While it is lived and inescapable experience, or a searing memory for many Indigenous Australians, it is something which needs to be intentionally

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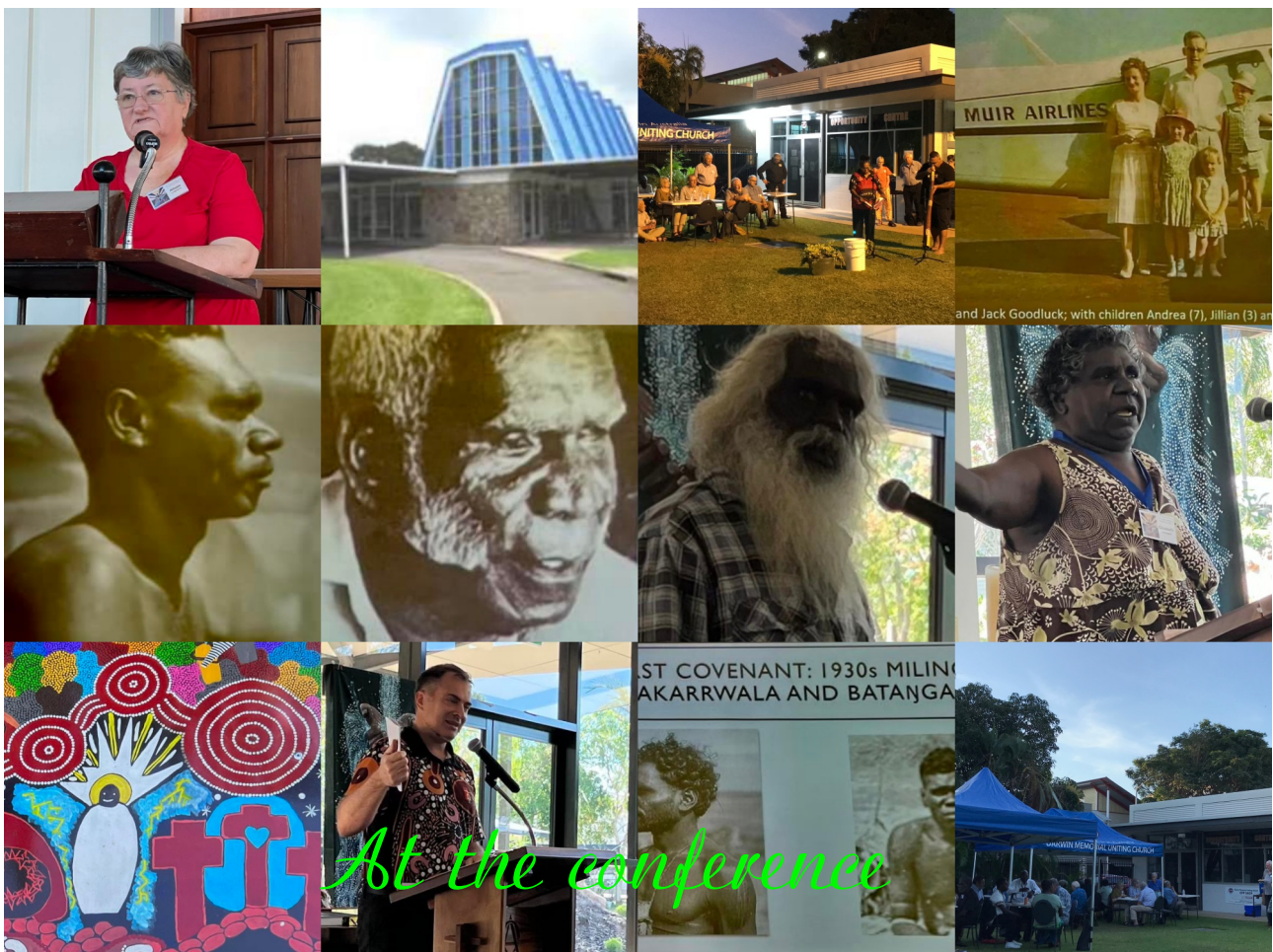


sought, confronted and wrestled with by non-Indigenous Australians. I am encouraged that, in my home city of Adelaide, this is a challenge that is being taken up with the encouragement and leadership of the UCA state and national history societies. Members of UCA congregations are being invited to find out about the history of their own area, asking such questions as

- Whose land was it before the settlers and the churches arrived?
- How have Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worked together in the area, or not?
- What vestiges—if that is all that is left—of the original inhabitants and their achievements can you uncover?
- What more substantial legacies remain?
- What opportunities are there now for walking together in your area?
- Were any of your own forebears involved in the processes of dispossession, and if so, how do you accommodate and respond to that knowledge?

This is real historical enquiry. It is not easy and it is not best done in isolation. It will certainly benefit from cooperation with Aboriginal organisations and exposure to Aboriginal insights, as well as from making use of existing academic work and archival records.

Involving yourself and your congregation in such historical enquiry is to be involved in a real way in the history of the Uniting Church and its predecessor denominations. Here at this newsletter, we will be keen to hear about your local pursuit of truth and where it leads you. My belief is that if we uncover and embrace the truth of our history, it will free us to achieve a greater measure of justice and reconciliation.





## The attempt to create a Scottish-type education system in New South Wales

**Dr Barry Bridges**

Scots believed that education should be available to all for the full social hierarchy and both genders. In a notably poor country economic pressures frequently got in the way of fully achieving this ideal. Presbyterians believed that basic religious education was the province of parents. Consequently, when Sunday Schools began to be established in Scotland in the earlier decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the purpose of most of them was to provide compensatory instruction in the basic secular subjects for those denied week-day education.

In contrast, the English saw education as essentially for males and worked to ration its provision to try to preserve the existing social hierarchy. Religion was used to present this as "God's will".

Running through the whole life of John Dunmore Lang, the first minister to come to New South Wales, is evidence that his greatest ambition was to found and head an educational institution which would develop into a university for New South Wales. Schools founded by Presbyterian ministers did develop into public universities in India, Canada and South Africa. Lang found an opportunity to make a start when his father died intestate in 1830 leaving him to inherit money as the older son. To this he added a government loan secured on a mortgage on buildings proposed to be erected. Lang hired building artisans and teaching staff in Scotland. His Australian College was erected next to his Scots Church in Jamieson Street Sydney from 1831.

The Australian College introduced to New South Wales education university-educated teachers, subject specialisation, and real examinations in place of managed demonstrations of requirements elsewhere held out as examinations. The Australian College had a library and equipment for the demonstration of scientific principles. It served as a model for later-founded schools.

Lang came to be generally regarded as having ruined the prospects of the Australian College by

insisting of remaining as Principal although repeated absence from Sydney and sometimes overseas for years at a time. Meanwhile he would leave his staff unpaid and unsupervised. It did not help an institution dependent upon cross-denominational enrolments that he insisted that religious instruction acceptable to him should be feature of the curriculum. One of the teachers, Henry Carmichael, a noted educationalist for his time, contended that religion had no place in schooling.

For Lang prime roles for the Australian College were the education of young native-born men to provide ministers for the church and missionaries for the Pacific islands. No candidates for either role were forthcoming. The only time that the College served for minister preparation was in the short period 1850–1852 when he brought out thirteen young men recruited in Britain under a promise of free board and education. The scheme collapsed when Lang could not elicit the public subscriptions he needed to finance it.

In 1841 Lang appealed to the governor, Sir George Gipps, for additional state aid to allow the Australian College to be put on a proper tertiary footing. This application was placed before a select committee of the Legislative Council. Lang was found to have so intermixed his own and public money that they could not be unscrambled. Part of the built fabric of the College was found to be on land which he owned and not on the College's own land. Lang testified that he had observed the requirements of the government mortgage that he not raise any other money on the security of the buildings. However, on the very next day after so testifying he raised a substantial further loan on a second mortgage. The select committee recommended that Gipps foreclose on the government mortgage. That would have closed down the Australian College, but it was allowed to survive.

The evidence before the select committee left a public perception that Lang was a man totally lacking in financial probity. He was never again able to attract significant public financial support for any of his many schemes.

After the failure of the minister-training scheme with imported students, the Australian College



became a school for boys under one master. Lang shut it down when it was decided to establish a university in Sydney.

When the founding of the University of Sydney was under discussion Lang argued strongly for adoption of the University of London model: a federation of colleges. Lang hoped that had that been accepted the Australian College would have survived as a constituent college, with him in the coveted role as Principal.

After a fruitless recruiting tour of Scotland, the Rev. William McIntyre founded the Maitland High School in 1855 to train a native ministry. As in the case of the Australian College, no candidates were forthcoming. However, for a few years this school won general praise for the quality of its instruction, until it too failed from inability to meet its costs.

Although Lang's focus was on his college he will knew that Indian and colonial foundations had needed to begin at the beginning with the alphabet and produce their own students. New South Wales needed an efficient educational ladder.

Currently the colony's elementary school teachers were often barely literate themselves. An excessive fondness for intoxicants was characteristic. One commentator said that the only qualification required was to have failed at everything else. Teachers were held in low esteem and poorly paid, receiving lower pay than someone employed as a storekeeper.

In Scotland in the earlier decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ministry was almost alone as a career for able sons of the poor. The number of aspirants greatly outnumbered vacancies occurring. Many taught schools to finance their university studies or later while waiting in hop of obtaining a parish. A man qualified but kept in teaching by not obtaining a place in the ministry was known as a 'stickit minister'. In Scotland a parochial schoolmaster was commonly university educated and capable of teaching ancient Greek and Latin. Normally he ranked in public esteem after the squire and the minister.

Just before Lang departed for England in 1836 the Legislative Council passed Governor Bourke's Church Act. This provided payment of teachers. Lang immediately resolved to recruit teachers in

## The Geoff Barnes Memorial Prize Award Guidelines

Nominations are invited for the best essay in history (not limited to but including church history) undertaken by an undergraduate student in any Uniting Church theological college.

The lecturer who graded the essay(s), identifies suitable essay(s) and notifies the Academic Dean or Principal of their college. The Academic Dean or Principal sends nomination(s) to the UCNHS. More than one essay may be nominated per college but only one winner will be awarded per calendar year. Nominations are to come only with the consent of the student, but direct nominations from students will not be accepted.

While essays about the Uniting Church or its precedent bodies are welcomed, the prize is not limited to those themes, but may be on any historical period or aspect of historical study.

The essay should already have been assessed by the college through its normal processes and received a grade result of 75% or higher.

Nominations should be received by the end of each calendar year (regardless of the semester in which the essay was written) and the prize will be awarded in February of the following year.

The essays will be evaluated by a judging panel of the UCNHS, preferably made up of those holding doctoral qualifications in history, as such are readily available.

The amount of the prize is currently \$250 and is subject to increase as the fund grows.

The Board reserves the right not to make an award in any given year if no essay of appropriate standard, as determined by its judging panel, is received.

*Contributions of any amount to the Geoff Barnes Memorial Fund are invited to ensure that the fund grows into the future and to increase the size of the prize. Contributions can be deposited into the following account: UCA Assembly Limited BSB: 032-828. Account number: 301985 Please indicate 'Geoff Barnes Memorial Fund' with your deposit (and your own name unless you wish your gift to remain anonymous).*



Scotland to found a parochial school network. Lang engaged fifteen teachers to return with him to New South Wales. These men included several specialising in infant schooling. This was the most progressive area of current schooling, having adopted learning through play. Lang's infant teachers were to be generally recognised as having considerably improved the quality of infants' education in New South Wales and set a desirable model for other providers.

Lang insisted that while awaiting for collection for departure for the colony his teacher recruits attend classes at the Normal Seminary of Educational Society of Glasgow, Britain's first established teacher training institution. The indications are that most of them made only a nominal response or evaded the obligation altogether. Nevertheless, Lang deserves credit for doing his best to have teacher preparation taken to a new level.

Lang spoilt his good work in recruiting Scottish teachers by bringing on a completely unjustifiable schism on his return to Sydney late in 1837. This schism was not resolved until 1840. New causes with small congregations found that they had to finance the minister's stipend and try to fund the building of a church. The teacher's salary came third in the list of priorities. Often there was nothing left for him and the new school had to be abandoned.

Most of Lang's other teacher recruits arriving in 1837 who were not forced out chose to leave teaching after a short period. As men of ability and learning they were unwilling to settle for the prevailing low esteem and low pay. They turned instead to more attractive occupations such as journalism. Nevertheless, they were given credit for showing colonists that they should demand better than the too often abysmal level of schooling hitherto available.

After reunion of the colonial church bodies, a parochial school system began to develop under later arriving teachers. In Scottish practice the minister was expected to supervise the work of his teacher. In New South Wales the impression is that the minister generally did not impose himself on the teacher, but respected his independence. A survey of lists of Church of England denominational teachers reveals a surprising number of Scots. In these schools the dominance of the clergy preserved peace and regularity of

payment, although the teachers appear too frequently to have been browbeaten.

Presbyterians formally acknowledged that minister and teacher were separate callings. A minister should be fully employed with his clerical functions. However, in New South Wales at that period it had to be tacitly accepted that in the circumstances a number of ministers needed to be allowed to perform both functions. In many of the outlying districts what settlers wanted from their clergy was a capacity for legal marriage, baptism and secular teaching for their children. If the minister did not teach there was no alternative available. Moreover, small fees for teaching could supplement an otherwise inadequate stipend.

Church of England and Roman Catholic parents were usually in sufficient concentration to support genuine denominational schools. Presbyterian and Wesleyan denominational schools needed to draw cross-denominational enrolments to attain a sufficient number for a viable school. To do this, they had to avoid creating any impression of using religious

#### 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.

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education for proselytising. In Presbyterian schools religious education of any kind came to be excluded from the curriculum, making it farcical to describe them as denominational schools.

After the Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland in May 1843, it ceased to be the church for the masses and became merely the largest of a number of minority Presbyterian churches. As some Scottish historians have pointed out, while church wars are not writ large in Scottish history a considerable part of the population took no interest in them. The parochial school system receded under pressure. Scotland as a whole moved towards acceptance of the ideal and economic rationality of the common school. In New South Wales Scottish Presbyterian teachers became leading advocates for transition to a local common school system.

Immigrant Scottish teachers brought with them an expectation of being treated with respect. They were involved in all cases on record of a teacher taking action to combat what he considered, usually fairly so, improper actions towards him on the part of individuals set over him.

By the time of the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1865 it was accepted that parochial schools teaching the denomination's particularities were impractical. The Assembly took the rational decision to hand the schools over to the Council of Education to become common schools.

Presbyterians had done more for the advancement of education in New South Wales from infancy to tertiary level than any other group of colonists. To recapitulate, they brought on the modernist infant school system, tried to bring in a network of parochial schools educating boys and girls, established some Sunday Schools for those excluded from week-day instruction, introduced graduate teachers, subject specialisation, departmentalisation of secondary and tertiary staff, the school library, the use of scientific equipment, and genuine examinations. They also led the way to predominant acceptance of the common school. For much of this John Dunmore Lang deserves

credit, although his desire for dominance caused some unnecessary setbacks.

*Dr Barry Bridges is a regular contributor to this newsletter.*

## Saturday at Nungalinga

**Jonathan Barker**



How appropriate it was that the last day of the Conference was held at Nungalinga College given that a week earlier the College had celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Participants were able to wander the lush grounds and view the new art works, some of which recall the stations of the cross; also to view a clip of a video made of the Nungalinga story.

The current Principal, Ben van Gelderen spoke about the “bothways” of contextualised Christianity, and Howard Amery recalled the early faltering attempts to compile the first Gupapuyŋu dictionary in the 1920s. Later the celebrated missionary linguist, Beulah Lowe’s translation of the scriptures became the basis for the dictionary which is still used today.

The conference acknowledged the centenary of the Methodist Overseas (sic) Mission’s founding of its work at Milngimbi. Louise Hamby and Lindy Allen shared the amazing archival records of this significant community which still retains a living traditional culture while also integrating aspects of Christianity into its ceremonial life. Lindsay Parkhill and David Mirrwana (the current pastor at Maningrida, who recalls as a boy the inspiration of the Rev. Gowan Armstrong who was the first Superintendent at Maningrida) showed film clips of the remarkable ongoing ceremonial life of the Western Arnhem Land peoples.

Perhaps of special interest to South Australians was  
*Continued on page 7*



Tony Goodluck's stories (he is now Moderator of the Northern Synod) about his childhood when his parents first went to Croker Island and then afterwards in Darwin during the time of Nungalinga's founding in 1973. His father the Rev. Jack Goodluck was a key player in establishing the College. When approached to be the first Principal, Jack turned down the offer thus opening the way for the Rev. Keith Cole from the Anglican church to play that role. Tony concluded his presentation by singing "Run into the Future Run" based on a poem by George Winunguj from Warrawi (Goulburn Island) over 50 years ago. The song had a prescient synchronicity with the current desire for First Nations people to be recognised and have a Voice which the Australian people would hear and respect.

*Jonathan Barker attended the UCNHS Conference held in Darwin in August this year.*

#### BESIDE THE RAILWAY LINE

Tourists off the bus, we stand  
Beside the railway line,  
Our tourist guide indicates:  
The fettlers' houses over there.  
The railway station master,  
He lived here.  
The pub just down the road.

All gone; not even a chimney stack.  
Mother earth devours the lot.

No Ozymandias monument  
Remains, bears witness,  
To settlers, railway fettlers,  
Or the station master.

Just a single peppermint tree,  
A stranger in the midst,  
Of this vast wide dry plain

Of Transience.  
Just salt bush, red earth  
To the far horizon.

*Ian Higgins:  
A Gallimaufry of Prose and Poetry*

## A question now asked

### Andrew Watts

[Andrew Watts was at the UCNHS conference in Darwin and wanted to ask a question, but he says, "I took too long to articulate this in writing (and in my head) and did not get time to ask this."]

*How are our current structures in the church (including how UAICC fits into those structures) still reflecting colonial elements that remain an obstacle to covenanting? Still marginalising—effectively meaning non-Indigenous are still at the centre?*

[Andrew then explains his thinking:]

Most of the mainstream churches still have many structural elements hanging around from their European/British/western heritage. In the history in these lands the most obvious example is any 'mission' activity with First Nations peoples came under 'Foreign' or 'Overseas' mission departments.

This colonial structure had all sorts of consequences. It could separate energies and efforts in mission, separate financial resources, separate attention from the wider church and society. At worst it could become competitive and conflicting. It could also have the effect of ministry with First Nations people being a small little thing happening on the margins of the church and contributing to an ignorant and/or indifferent inertia in the wider church when asked to respond to a call or challenge - like Covenanting.

An historical example is how the Presbyterian Church's response to the establishment of Flynn's AIM and their response to work with First Nations people at the same time being separated and effectively diminished. The secular world often talk of centring First Nations people to help have a genuine response to needs in health, education, justice and other spheres. How are our current structures in the church (including how UAICC fits into those structures) still reflecting colonial elements that remain an obstacle to covenanting? Still marginalising effectively meaning non-Indigenous are still at the centre?





## A story well told

### Dean Eland

Families, congregations and communities all have a story to tell. Members of the 4<sup>th</sup> biennial history conference were welcomed to Darwin Memorial Uniting Church at the opening session on Thursday evening and papers were presented on site Friday 23 August. On Sunday members and guests returned to Darwin Memorial to share in the congregations 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary event. All those present were inspired by the service including music, reflective liturgy and the sermon by Assembly President Rev Sharon Hollis based on Romans 12:4-8.

We were reminded that the "Wesleyan Methodist Church in South Australia sent Rev Archibald Bogle who together with Mrs Bogle arrived in August 1873". "Millenia before that, God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Larrakia people, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians of these lands and waters since time immemorial".

Short stories and greetings were shared about the church's pastoral ministry over several generations including a reflection, "something for everyone" by Gavin Chin. Conversation over lunch followed and in the afternoon members visited the Chinese Museum.

Many ingredients of the Darwin story came together on that day and guests appreciated the way past events and its present ministry was influenced by its city setting and two life changing events that will always be remembered.

The main street presence of its 1960s building is a reminder that on one Christmas Day, "Santa did not make it into Darwin in the early hours of Christmas Day 1974 but Cyclone Tracy did and wrecked the place. The church suffered minor damage but was structurally sound".

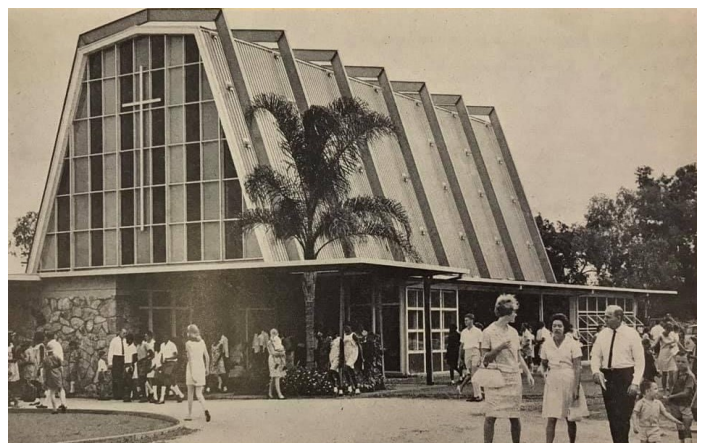
The WW2 Fujita Garden memorial and photos in the hall are one expression of the commitment of the congregation to forgiveness and peace and records the continuing relationship between the

city and Japanese families. The popular Op Shop and nearby CBD plaza development is another expression of the church's openness to visitors and the street community and embodies its mission to "walk with God in the city".

In 2020 the Rev Steven Orme produced the history of the congregation, "Working together from the beginning" and other records include a summary of the 19th century Methodist ministry with the Chinese community.

The anniversary event, church presence, published documents and art work honour the past and indeed tell the story. They illustrate how foundations once laid continue to provide a second home for families, a gathering place for those who are "members one of another" in Darwin's diverse and growing city centre.

*The Rev. Dr Dean Eland is the President of the South Australian Uniting Church History Society. He attended the UCNHS Conference in Darwin.*



*Darwin Memorial Uniting Church*

*Have you read any new books recently and could tell us a bit about something you've read and thought worthy of passing on?*

*Don't hesitate! Write a few words about the book and send them to the Editor. It's always good to hear of interesting books worth reading!*



## A history of Darwin Methodist Church

**From *The Spectator*, November 7, 1928**

One of the oldest churches connected with Methodism in Australia is the one at Darwin in the far distant north. The town was originally called Palmerston, and just 55 years ago the ministers assembled in Conference in the month of March in Adelaide, South Australia, were somewhat startled to hear a voice during one of its debates, saying, "Why not send a minister to Palmerston?" Half the assembly did not know where it was, and the other half wanted to know "What for?" A few days later it was decided to appoint a minister, and the name against Palmerston was that of the Rev. A.J. Bogle. That was in 1873, when South Australia was interested in the far north of the continent. At that time the foot of the white man had been treading the shores for just half a century, but there was no church organisation in the only town worthy of the name. Its very location, the intense tropical heat, and the itinerating nature of the people all conspired to retard progress. Mr Bogle arrived in August to establish a Wesleyan church, one solitary man to keep the flag flying for the whole territory, one lonely minister representing the great Protestant community.

After three strenuous years in failing health, the minister returned to Adelaide, and another took his place in the person of the Rev. J.D. Langsford. Small causes were opened wherever there was a settlement. The minister visited as far as Pine Creek, the journey being done on horseback with black boys as guides. For 35 years South Australian Methodism continued to send its men, and then handed over its interests to Queensland as it was nearer for purposes of control. Then for fifteen years clergymen of Queensland ministered to the spiritual wants of the people; thus 50 years sped by without any great degree of development. During this time a railway had been constructed to Pine Creek, and later on another 50 miles were added, making the terminus the Katherine, but the general conditions of the country had not improved, for the mining industry largely failed, and the cattle-

raising areas had not proved flourishing. Darwin town had not increased, great freezing works had been constructed, and for a short time they operated, but now had ceased.



Fifty years ago a commodious church was erected on the present site, and was blown down in 1898 by a hurricane. Another was constructed by Simpson and Sons at Adelaide, erected in their back yard, and friends invited to view this remarkable steel church, guaranteed to withstand cyclones and white ants, then marked in sections, and sent on a sailing ship to Darwin, where it was re-erected. In transit a small iron plate was lost, and the building was erected without it, as another was on its way from Adelaide to take its place, and it is apparently still on its way, as two iron tie beams are still waiting for its appearance to make them fast. This steel church is made to appear like weatherboard, and it is only on examination that the difference is discovered. A manse was erected, which also suffered by storms and white ants.

After 50 years of operation, the Methodist Missionary Society, in 1921, took over the whole of the property and the work, and established a new system in conjunction with their policy of aboriginal stations, which were situated on islands some 200 miles away from Darwin. The Rev. Stanley Jarvis was appointed by the Board of Missions, for he had long been a missionary in Fiji, and had wide experience in Western Australia. The property wanted remodelling. An appeal was made to the people, and in less than two weeks they contributed £200, while the Mission Board supplied £700 in two years. The transformation which has been effected upon material things is a reflex of the increased spiritual life in evidence among the people of the church, and this, too, at a time of material and commercial prospects of the



North Australia are at a time of low ebb. Today the church is entirely maintained by the people, but the expenses of the minister are a charge upon the Missionary Society. Twenty-one clergymen have come and gone; the first minister of over half a century ago would have rejoiced to see this day, as undoubtedly many of his successors, of whom it may be said: "They have rested from their labours and their works do follow them". The fifty-fourth anniversary has just been held, and the contributions from the Sunday and the function on the following day amounted to £85. The people, while comparatively few in number, are proud of their church and the place it occupies in the life of the community. (Written by Mr Harston of Melbourne, who has recently visited Darwin.)

*This article is from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Archives where all the editions of The Spectator and The New Spectator have now been digitised.*

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## Notes from the UCNHS conference in Darwin

### Ron Coster

What a wonderful experience, Darwin in August, the weather warming up, humidity not too high and perfect for the Sunset Dinner Cruise with Alison and Robin Longworth. We were returning with the prospect of meeting several friends from years past as we had been in the Top End in 1980–89 with the Aboriginal Resource and Advisory Service—an agency of the Uniting Church, first at Gapuwiyak (NE Arnhemland) then in Darwin where we became part of the Casuarina Uniting congregation.

We added a few days prior to and after the conference so that we could grasp a glimpse of the many changes to the city and suburbs. The Museum and Art Gallery had an excellent display of the history of Arnhem Land Progress Association, the largest Aboriginal owned and run corporation in Australia. It grew from the network of Mission Stores. In the photos I was able to identify a number of folk that I had met in early 1980s; however, the excitement was tinged with sadness as we learned of the early deaths of other beautiful people. Nungalinga College was celebrating 50 years the week before the

Conference so that was a special opportunity to learn about their programs. You can google 'The Nungalinga Jubilee Story'.

Thursday evening was Conference registration followed by a buffet dinner (hosted by members of the Darwin Memorial Church) then members of the Larrakiya community welcomed us to Larrakiya Country, the land on which Darwin now stands, through a smoking ceremony and the sound of the didgeridoo.

The Memorial Church was the venue for Friday's presentation of papers. An enormous amount of thought and work had gone into preparing some sixteen papers on topics ranging from the life of the Rev. Wali Fejo to 'Covenanting' and the development of linguistic work. Behind the scenes was the modern technology needed to deliver image and sound to participants scattered across the country via Zoom. A disappointment was losing the link out to Arnhem Land where the Keynote speaker Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA had prepared a thought provoking address.

On Friday evening members of the Chinese community treated us to a special talk on the early Methodist ministry with Darwin's Chinese people and a viewing of their Chung Wah Society Museum and Temple. For some of us the evening concluded with time at some of the Darwin Festival events.

On Saturday morning buses had been arranged to transport us from the Memorial Church to Casuarina where the second set of papers was delivered at Nungalinga College. Nungalinga (meaning 'old-man rock') is the home to theology studies and many other courses specifically for First Nations people. A legacy of Covid is the creation in the college grounds of a 'Way of the Cross' red-gravel pathway winding between old-man pandanus palms. This depicts the events that led up to Jesus' crucifixion. Each station has a plaque with a painting and QR code. Scanning the QR with your phone opens webpages containing relevant scripture and other links. The path ends at an open tomb. How technology has again changed people's access to the bible and Christ's message to all people!

At Nungalinga we came closer to First Nations people and were reminded that this year is the centenary of the founding of Milngimbi Mission. A



standout story for me was the Rev. Tony Goodluck's recollections of his childhood friends and events as he grew up at Minjilang (Croker Island). A childhood experience that has profoundly influenced his life. The stories embodied in the Aboriginal art at Nungalinya and the Conference handbook reflect the understanding that God has been with First Nations people for all time and that the story of Jesus life and resurrection provides hope in the lives of oppressed people today.

As a conclusion to the Conference on Sunday morning members joined Darwin Memorial Church in celebrating 100 years of ministry. We shared lunch and a 100th year birthday cake cut by the oldest and youngest members of the congregation.

Many people made this a successful conference so thanks to Glen O'Brien (chair), Steve and Judy Orme for your leadership. The hospitality was great, the weather was great and we reconnected with wonderful friends and places.

*Ron Coster is a member of UCNHS.*

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## In Memoriam: The Rev. Mr Robert Gray

### Ian Higgins

On the day at Monash University when my tutor said, "We've decided to upgrade your M.A. studies to those needed for a PhD, I said, I have decided to finish my sociology studies because, "Haecceity has eclipsed my mind's focus on sociology, which deals with often large numbers of people."

Obviously nonplussed, he simply said, "Haecceity?"

I responded with a mini-monologue on how I had arrived at this word encapsulating a very important concept. Haecceity had been apparently been coined by Duns Scotus of Oxford. I had come across this through reading the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Haecceity focuses on the individual person or as in Aboriginal culture some special tree, not gum trees, but this one unique tree.

In this essay, my intention is to focus on solely on this one individual, who I believe can represent a

## Newsletter bloopers

We've all seen these but they're worth a chuckle.

*The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.*

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The sermon this morning: 'Jesus Walks on the Water.' The sermon tonight: 'Searching for Jesus.'

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*Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.*

-----  
Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say 'Hell' to someone who doesn't care much about you.

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*Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.*

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*Miss Charlene Mason sang 'I will not pass this way again,' giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.*

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For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

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Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

-----  
Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

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*A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow..*

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At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

-----  
Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

-----  
Scouts are saving aluminium cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

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Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered....



somewhat forgotten but significant tradition within the Australian Presbyterian Church in pre-union days.

I have selected a country parish minister, the Rev. Mr Robert Gray, who served all his days of active ministry during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s before the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Mr Gray was the minister in the rural Presbyterian parishes of Hay, Harden, The Rock and Lachlan—not to be confused with “Hay, Hell, and Booligal”, which is a proverbial saying about those towns in the hot region around the Murrumbidgee. The phrase became the title of a poem by Banjo Patterson, with the opening lines,

“You come and see me boys,  
You’ll find a welcome and a bed,  
And whisky any time you call.”  
*Hay, Hell and Booligal.*

The irony is, as we shall see, this could be said by Mr Gray, as the Presbyterian minister of the parishes in which he served all his days of active ministry.

Robert Gray was born in Glasgow Scotland before the turn of the 20th century. He worked in the shipyards in their Glaswegian hey-day. This was to be a rough apprenticeship in human behaviour. It was a culture of “the survival of the fittest”—a phrase not utilised by Charles Darwin until the fifth edition (1869) of his *On the Origin of Species*.

Mr Gray as a young man, like his father was a strong unionist. At the shipyards he was a leader in a fight to have a change in the attitude of the management. The unionists insisted that every person be addressed as “Mr” to replace the practice of the bosses, being always addressed as Mr, whereas the workers including the apprentices were called by their first names. The workers by their unionist agitation did change the culture. It became one of mutual respect, as indicated by everyone adopting the use of Mister.

Because of this experience, Robert Gray always preferred “Mr” never “Bob,” or “Robert”: that is until he became a grandfather, when one grandchild’s first words he spoke was “Bob” . So while he remained “Mr Gray”, to most, the

grandchildren had special exemption and could say, ‘Bob’.

If anyone of us as readers wishes to enter into the culture of the Glasgow shipyards vicariously, just read the harrowing and horrendous, biography *Billy*, the story of Billy Connolly, written by his wife Pamela Stephenson. Connolly once said, “I was lucky to escape this death trap.” For Gray the experience was less painful. Unlike Connolly, he was not branded as gay. More likely it was formative for Gray’s later approach to being a minister, encapsulated in a text from Ecclesiastes, which in Scots is “Be not unco guid, nor unco bad, both roads lead to perdition” (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Whereas in Protestant England, until quite recently, Protestants usually had in the house a copy of the Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress*: up north the most favoured two books were the Bible and poems by Robbie Burns. One famous poem is, “Address to the uncoguid”.who were the self-righteous Presbyterians of the day. Mr Gray shared this dislike.

Mr Gray served in the so-called Great War. He had no illusions as to the horrors of war. His daughter Marjorie says the experiences there, facilitated his developing ability, “to communicate with the common man” as was the terminology of the day.

After, and presumably during the war, there emerged the deadly Spanish Flu, which he did not contract. Then came the Roaring Twenties: only to be followed by the soul-destroying Great Depression. In this time of uncertain employment in Great Depression times, Robert decided to try for Australia. He chose Queensland, because there lived an aunt and uncle. Later he drifted around New South Wales, working at whatever job he could find.

At Junee he met Gladys Jennings, daughter of the Presbyterian parson. She would become his wife, and eventually the minister’s wife. According to their daughter, “She did the minister’s wife thing; even though she was not very religious”. In the nomenclature of the day Robert Gray was “very religious”. As a young child, he was gladly attending Sunday school.

His training for the Presbyterian ministry was under Professor Samuel Angus, a migrant from



Northern Ireland and he was as saturated in Burns as was Robert Gray.

After studying at Princeton, Angus lectured in various American and European universities and in 1914 he was appointed Professor of New Testament and Church History at St. Andrew's College in the University of Sydney.

For both Angus and Gray, the Gospel was the good news of divine love for the whole family of humanity, not wrapped up beyond recognition in the grave clothes of abstruse theology..

In contemporary philosophic words: Jesus did not create the Other, which could be demonised and subjugated. Bob Gray did not follow the tradition of Pauline Christianity of diving humans into Believers and Unbelievers. Christians and pagans. He adhered to the concept of a popular hymn in the liberal Presbyterian tradition which begins:

O Son of Man, our hero strong and tender,  
Whose servants are the brave in all the earth.

Another way of summing up his liberal theology was "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" [sic]. Whereas the old Methodist hymnbook had the opening lines, "Methodism was born in song", the Revised Church Hymnary could have begun with "In the beginning of the Church of Scotland was the Word". Liberal Presbyterians placed great emphasis on preaching the Word (not just giving homilies or short shallow commentaries on a common lectionary, whose readings are chosen without any regard for our Australian seasons).

One unusual behaviour of Mr Gray was his fraternising with the 'enemy', those Roman Catholics. Once, a pope blessed Australia, and many Presbyterians were infuriated. They wrote letters of indignation to the press, abhorring this act. Mr Gray wrote a letter to say that in view of a lot of Presbyterians he knew, "They need every blessing they can get". What he got, however, was red hot coals on his head.

At Harden his behaviour as a Presbyterian minister was seen as not right, as he became friendly with the Mother Superior in the convent over the road from the Presbyterian Church. Both had been in Lachlan. Mr Gray still received copies of the Lachlan newspaper, which he read then gave it to her, which often resulted in

conversations about shared interests in Lachlan. This was an era in which Protestant and Catholic acrimony was at its height.

During that time my Mum took me into, not outside, the local Catholic Church, to see our favourite postmistress married. Protestants were only allowed stand outside in the church yard. Her anti-Catholic Love family indicated their displeasure. Protestants in our area were not allowed to play with Catholics. Mum broke this rule as we were friends with the O'Regan family, and Mum and Mrs O'Regan were both war widows.

In those days what was seen as 'politics' (the discussion of which was forbidden) crept into the pulpit of our minister's church in suburban Brisbane. On one occasion after the 7.30pm service, a liberal Presbyterian minister was confronted by a posse of irate elders. This was after his sermon ( never call it a reflection, Well Liberals never did.) This sermon had been a theological analysis of what Prime Minister Robert Menzies had said on the 7pm ABC news. The question was, "Just how long did you take to prepare that sermon? He looked at them glaringly and tartly said, "About forty Years." That shut down further questioning.

In pastoral care Robert Gray followed an ancient Church of Scotland practice and one which today in a multicultural society a chaplain would adopt. He became the *de facto* chaplain, or God Bod or Sky Pilot or Padre for anyone seeking his help—never mind what a person believed. That meant being involved in the community.

There were some humorous occasions in Mr Gray's life and stories that he told, such as the time when he was present at the exhumation of a body in the town cemetery. The undertaker provided a little relief when he managed to get half decayed lid of the coffin off, dragged out the body to exclaim, as he lifted the body, "Thank God he is now so light."

Then there was the distressed town drunkard coming up the Manse path, which had a little curve. He was having difficulty staying on the path, while crying copious tears. Mr Gray comes and says, "What happened?" " Pat my drinking partner is dead." "That's sad." "No! That's not the point! Pat is C of E and they buried him in the RC bit of the cemetery." "But why worry," Mr Gray



said, "He's always been pretty frisky. On the day of resurrection when the graves give up their dead, Pat'll look around; see he is not with his bunch and jump over the fence." "Thank you, Father." Mr Gray replied, "I think we should have a glass of whisky in his memory." And so they did, which made it even harder for him to navigate the path and not put a foot in the nasturtium garden bed.

Mr Gray tells the story of the good Presbyterian elder who on his rounds of handing out the cards for the three-monthly communion, decided to call in at his friend who was a jack-of-all-trades: undertaker, cabinet maker, including coffins made to size, not chosen of the shelf. He was also the town's gravedigger. Our elder can't raise his friend by knocking on the big front door. He hears him hammering away out the back: walks around the side to see a body lying on trestles, part covered in tarpaulin, with two bare grey feet poking out.

This is all too much. He ejaculates, just as the man of many skills is coming around the corner, "Jesus Christ.!" "You're right," his friend replies, and pulls off the covering. "It's Jesus Christ, alright. How did you guess? He fell off the cross at that Catholic Church last Sunday night. I've got to get him back up there, properly nailed this time, before mass on Sunday".

At the Presbyterian Theological Hall of Emmanuel College within the University of Queensland, in the pre-union days, over sixty years ago, we studied the theological works of John Calvin, Karl Barth, Emile Brunner and for Church History, Kenneth Latourette, but the writings of Samuel Angus, not even his name, were ever mentioned. I met, as it were, Samuel Angus and his ideas in the manse at Harden in New South Wales, in conversations with Mr Gray. Now having been a minister for over sixty years, Presbyterian and then Uniting, all my volumes of the works by Barth, Brunner, Calvin and Latourette, have been discarded on my faith journey. Most of their ideas have faded away. However, now the words of Samuel Angus are engraved on my soul. They have not passed away.

### **Acknowledgment**

*I could not have written this essay without the guidance of Marjirie Hall, the daughter of Mr Gray. Shortly after her father died she gave me his extensive collection of the works of Samuel Angus.*

## **"A charming personality, a big wholehearted optimism, and any amount of energy": a life of Marion Agnes Helen Dow (Sister Helen)**

**Cheryl Griffin**



*The Herald, 1927*

In a single sentence, the 1 April 1916 edition of *Western Women* encapsulates the life of Marion Agnes Helen Dow (1872–1927), known to the communities in which she served as Sister Helen. From the time she was accepted as a member of the Methodist Sisterhood in 1899 until her death in 1927, she worked selflessly on behalf of

others.

She grew up in a well-educated, well-connected Methodist family. Her father John Lamont Dow (1837–1923) was a journalist, an editor with the *Age* and later agricultural editor of the *Leader* newspaper. He was also a politician, serving as the Member for Kara Kara from 1877 to 1893 and as Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Mines from 1886 to 1890 in the Gillies-Deakin coalition government.

The Dow family lived in a house they called "Kara" on the Nepean Highway at Aspendale and it was here that Nell, as she was known in the family, and her six siblings were raised. The children attended Brighton State School. One sister, Edith, died in 1894 aged 17. The others went on to live interesting lives.

The oldest child of the family was David, two years Helen's senior. Educated at Geelong Grammar, this big man with a forceful personality became a journalist, later serving as the official secretary for Australia in the US in 1924–31 and acting commissioner-general in 1931–38. His son, Hume Dow, is also remembered as a journalist and literary scholar.



Her sister Amy, two years Helen's junior, was a flamboyant woman, according to a family member, and worked as a journalist for the *Bulletin* and the *Age*. She married in 1914 and divorced ten years later, after which she continued to support herself through her writing.

Maree, born 1878, and known in the family as Daisy, married painter and art critic Henry Bromilow (Harry) Harrison in 1917. Of her, a cousin wrote "Daisy was different, she loved art and arty things... She delighted in always looking different..."

John (known as Jack), born 1881, was educated at Scotch College. A ship's engineer, he served in WW1, then went into business in Papua New Guinea, injured his leg on a coral reef and developed an infection that brought about his death in February 1924. Dubbed "Dow of the Islands", he was described as a "loveable fellow and born rover".

Sister Kara (Olive), born 1883, has been described by a family member as precise and particular about unimportant things. In February 1923 her sister Helen had admitted her to a private asylum at Brighton called Merton Licensed House. Things went downhill and Olive was moved to Mont Park Hospital for the Insane where she remained until her death in 1930. Like Sister Helen, she is buried with her parents at Brighton Cemetery.

When Helen Dow became Sister Helen in 1899, she gave up her comfortable home life and began a life of voluntary service in the streets and lanes of Melbourne, attached to the Central Methodist Mission. A cousin wrote of her as one of (or the) first women to preach a sermon from a Methodist pulpit in Melbourne. That cousin was present and said Helen "did remarkably well", something that might be expected, perhaps, in an articulate family such as hers.

After 10 years' service in Melbourne, Sister Helen moved to Ballarat in July 1909, where she was attached to the Lydiard Street church. In the four years she spent in Ballarat, she was appointed an

Inspector of the Department of Neglected Children, a project promoted by Alfred Deakin's wife Pattie who was president of the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society. During her time in Ballarat, Sister Helen also served as secretary of the Ballarat District Nursing Society established in 1911 and modelled on the Melbourne District Nursing Society for which Pattie Deakin worked for many years. Such arduous work took a toll on her health and on medical advice she returned to Melbourne in late 1913.

Despite her poor health, Sister Helen was appointed to the Geelong City Methodist circuit in early 1914 and remained there for several years before moving to Perth in 1916 where she continued her work as a mission sister based at Perth Central Mission. Perth's *Western Women* newspaper wrote of her as "someone to be reckoned as a big addition to the ranks of women in West Australia who are in earnest and worthwhile", but she was unable fulfil this promise. Her tenure in Perth was short—just twelve months—yet in this time she helped set up a Rescue Home for Girls, as well fulfilling her many other duties.

In 1917, on medical advice, Sister Helen gave up her missionary work. After three months rest at her family home in Aspendale, she moved north to the Sydney Central Mission to assume the less arduous position of 'Office Sister' and editor of the weekly Mission paper. The Sydney Mission was huge, the largest in Australia with ten Sisters. Although Sister Helen's duties were lighter than those she had previously undertaken, she was kept busy interviewing, obtaining speakers and organising singers for the people's services.

It is unclear why she returned to Melbourne. Perhaps she felt she needed to be closer to home after her mother's death in September 1919 and the subsequent decline in her youngest sister Olive's health. Acting on medical advice Olive was placed in a private

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hospital late in 1922. In November 1923, after the death of their father, she was admitted to Mont Park. It was Sister Helen, then based at the YWCA in Russell Street, who signed the documentation, supported by their siblings.

Sister Helen's own health deteriorated and for the last two years of her working life she remained at YWCA where she worked for The New Settlers' League and the Travellers' Aid Society. For two hours a day she was available to give advice to young women in need, the *Herald* newspaper noting that she continued to wear her grey Sister's uniform which earned her the title the 'Grey Lady'.

Eventually, though, she had to stop work. In March 1926 she underwent a series of operations at the Queen Victoria Hospital and after convalescing for a brief time was admitted to the Austin Hospital where she remained until her death on 15 August 1927 of bladder cancer. She was 54 years old and had worked as a Sister of the People for almost 28 years.

The respect shown for this selfless woman is clear in the description of her funeral in the *Age*. This "zealous woman worker", whose concern for the welfare of girls and women outweighed her own needs, was buried with her parents at Brighton Cemetery after an impressive service at Wesley Church, Lonsdale Street. The church was crowded to the doors with women of all ranks and classes, we are told, and the coffin was hidden by great banks of flowers and wreaths.

Despite her own fragility, this important but little-known figure in women's welfare work was for almost thirty years a consistent and energetic worker among the needy of three Australian states. She began her work assisting the Reverend A.R. Edgar at Melbourne City Mission, then worked in Ballarat and Geelong before relocating to Perth where she initiated a number of important support schemes for women and girls. Forced to move again for the sake of her health, she took over the editorship of the Mission newspaper in Sydney. She did not give up her work lightly, but after a brief period based at YWCA headquarters in Melbourne, she had no choice. The Austin Hospital became her home for the last year of her life, a sad end for this selfless 'Lady in Grey'.

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