

Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 3 No. 2 June 2021



Wesley Church Perth 1870

The 150th anniversary of the Wesley Church in Perth was celebrated this year, deferred from last year because of the pandemic. The Jarrah tree that can just be seen in the background was the site of the first Methodist service held in Western Australia on June 6 1830. Wesley Church in 2021 is part of the Uniting Church in the City, a partnership between neighbouring Uniting churches.

Living with rapid change

It's not exactly a new topic, but the pandemic has thrust upon us the need for real flexibility and learning to plan to have one's plans disrupted! As I write Victoria is in its fifth lockdown, New South Wales is in an extended lockdown, and in both states many events that have been held on a regular basis and upon which local communities have depended in many ways have had to be cancelled. Our third biennial conference was successfully held because we could see the need to have flexible planning for the face-to-face events and the use of Zoom communications for those of us who were unable to be present in person. Congratulations to the planning team and many thanks!

(Robert Renton)

This edition

This edition follows the third biennial conference of the Uniting Church National History Society, held this time in Parramatta, NSW.

It was also the first conference of the Society that was held in 'hybrid' form, with several participants 'attending' via Zoom. This turned out to be very helpful, as Victoria at the time was in lockdown. For such a short conference it was also helpful in saving money (and the environment) for those who would have had to travel long distances.

There are two reports from the conference, one from an 'in-person' participant, and one from a Zoom participant.

The Society has also thanked retiring Board members William Emilsen and Patricia Curthoys, who were instrumental in the establishment of the Society in 2017 at the first conference held in Adelaide.

Finally, there is an article on the 150th anniversary of the "coming of the light on the Torres Strait" when in 1871 a Congregational minister from the London Mission Society anchored at Erub (Darnley Island).



President's Report to the 2021 AGM



I begin by encouraging us each to consider the lands upon which we are situated. The Conference meets on the lands of the Darug people at 'the place where the eels lie down,' but via Zoom we are gathered on many lands and waters that have never been ceded by the original inhabitants. We pay our respect to those custodians of the land, to their elders, past, present and emerging, and to any First Nations people who are participating in our Conference and we renew our commitment to reconciliation and justice.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside the dedicated members of the Board—Bob Coote (NSW), Patricia Curthoys (NSW), William Emilsen (NSW), Alison Longworth (WA), Steve Orme (NT), Julia Pitman (QLD), Judith Raftery (SA), and Robert Renton (VIC)—each of whom has faithfully volunteered their time and energy on top of busy lives and other existing commitments. I want particularly to thank William and Patricia, both of whom have indicated that they will not be continuing for another term on the Board. As Past President, William's statesmanlike presence and wide experience has made me feel more secure in my role and we have relied on his insights a great deal. Patricia has brought professionalism, wisdom, and keen insight to all of our deliberations and in her role as Vice-President of the Society. Both will be very much missed, and we hope they continue to stay connected to the Society as members and friends.

The Board has continued to meet very effectively via Zoom which has bridged the physical distance between us very well. At its 12 March 2021 meeting, the Society's objectives were considered, and it was decided that they should remain a standing item on the agenda as we work through ways of achieving them more fully. The Society has seen only slight growth in membership since our 2020 AGM, with our membership currently at 88 and a balance of funds of \$27,362 as at 8 June 2021. Our Facebook page has attracted 378 followers and 357 'likes'. Our Twitter feed has 49 followers and our website, hosted on the Assembly webpage, continues to carry basic information on the Society, news items, Conference Proceedings and our regular newsletter in PDF format. There is a need for us to think creatively about how to increase membership, especially the membership of younger people. Perhaps we can recruit 12 new members as a result of this Conference and reach the coveted number of 100!

Though not required by the Constitution, it is interesting to note that the Board of the UCNHS has representatives from all Synods and the rotating of our biennial conference and annual lectures is designed to give us a good national presence. Synod historical societies in South Australia and Vic/Tas (led by Judith Raftery and Robert Renton respectively) continue to operate in partnership with the National Society and the Queensland, West Australian, and Northern Synods remain meaningfully engaged in highlighting history under the leadership of Julia Pitman, Alison Longworth and Steve Orme. There is a gap left in NSW, though we did receive the transfer of many members and all the assets of the former NSW/ACT Society. Many people share membership in both their Synod Societies and the National Society. While belonging to this network the National Society has the responsibility of reporting and being accountable to Assembly which I have done in my President's Report to the 16th Assembly. Though not a Member of Assembly, I will engage with Assembly staff and other agency leaders via Zoom on Sunday 11 July, the weekend before Assembly is held. My report has drawn the attention of the Assembly to two matters of importance.

1) There is a need to continue to ensure that our theological colleges are sufficiently resourced to offer candidates and other students adequate training in history and that they are well acquainted with the history of the Uniting Church and its precedent churches. This includes ensuring adequate staffing of the colleges and the ongoing presence of historical study in theological curricula. It is recognised that theological education is Synod-based activity, but the Assembly holds responsibility, through its Education for Ministry Working Group, for the standards of formation, education and training for the ministry of the Word, ministry of Deacon, ministry of Pastor and ministry of Lay Preacher.

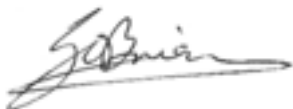
2) The archival resources of the Synods are a highly significant resource. A recent flooding event in the Tasmanian Archives saw damage to the collection. Are there steps the Assembly could take that might assist Synods to preserve their archival collections, for example, through digitization? Serious mould and water damage to materials in the Camden Theological Library in Sydney led to the digitisation and online hosting of over 16,000 items on the *Illuminate* platform. A coordinated national policy on archive preparation that utilises the most up to date archival technology would be of great assistance to Synods.

Our third biennial conference has seen an increase in participants over the 2019 conference to over 60 participants. A very big thanks is due to William Emilsen, Patricia Curthoys and all members of the planning committee for the work they have put into making the conference a success. The theme *Growing Up Uniting* represents a concerted effort meaningfully to engage younger members of the UCA and to celebrate the contribution they have made to the Church's life. We were very pleased to have had as one of our keynote speakers, the President of the Uniting Church (and our patron) Dr Deidre Palmer, the Executive Director of the National Church Life Survey, Associate Professor Ruth Powell, Dr William Emilsen, and Dr Elizabeth Watson. Thanks are due to every presenter and to the leadership and staff of UTC for hosting the Conference. Projecting forward to 2023 we are looking forward to the hospitality of the Northern Synod, as we plan to host the next conference there in association with commemorative celebrations of the establishing of Milngimbi Methodist Mission in 1923 and the Wesleyan congregation in Darwin (then Palmerston) in 1873.

Our publications have continued under the publications committee led by Patricia Curthoys and Robert Renton. The Proceedings of our last conference have been published by the Society as *Finding a Home in the Uniting Church*, and our newsletter, *Uniting Church History and Heritage* continues to regularly appear, under the editorship of Robert Renton. This year's conference proceedings will also be published by the Society, edited by Patricia Curthoys and William Emilsen.

We will soon arrive at a time when the entire constituency of the UCA will have no memory of the Uniting Church's precedent churches. Many (probably most) will have 'grown up Uniting.' They will have a rich history to explore but will also make their own history, which will in turn become the material of historical enquiry for generations to come. The way we empower and equip the young people of today's Uniting Church to engage meaningfully in historical study, to recognise the power of memory, and both the pitfalls and value of commemoration, will help shape the future Church. In 2002, we wish to continue the pattern of the 2020 Public Lecture (which took the form of an expert panel on the topic of UCA Redress) to consider matters of real public importance. Historical study does not exist merely out of antiquarian interest but is a resource for addressing matters of pressing concern in the present. Perhaps we might consider the response of historians to *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* or consider the cultural movement that is saying a long overdue 'Enough!' to the misogynistic treatment of women in the Australian workplace. As you have participated in this conference you may have discerned ways in which the historical reflections given here inform the Church's present witness and mission. If so, we very much want to hear from you.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Glen O'Brien', with a stylized, flowing script.

(Associate Professor Rev. Glen O'Brien, President, UCNHS)

The 2021 Conference

Growing up Uniting History Conference – Story, Listening and Hope.

by Carolyn Craig-Emllsen (who was able to participate in person at the conference).

The third biennial conference of the Uniting Church National History Society (UCNHS) “Growing up Uniting”, held over the long weekend in June at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, positively zinged. By Saturday lunchtime participants arriving for the day or the remainder of the weekend had already heard that “this was a good conference”. There was a buzz in the air.

Could it be that history has something to say and that there is an unbreakable thread that binds past, present and future of the journeys of the pilgrim people of the Uniting Church?

Over the weekend there were 17 presentations including two multi-cultural panels and a closing plenary session. A sizeable number of presenters and participants joined the conference on Zoom from interstate including the entire Victorian group with Glen O’ Brien, the President of UCNHS, Robert Renton and others because Victoria was in lockdown at the time. Damian Palmer accomplished the demanding task managing the role of technical Zoom host.

There was a recurring story at this conference and it reflects what is happening right now in the UCA. Those telling the story are from different generations, different states and different cultures. The story is a passionate mix of gratitude but also of anxiety and longing. Within this mix is the challenge to find hope. The conference reflected this story of tension. It also gave active expression as to how this could be held creatively.

There is gratitude for a church which offers hospitality, belonging and acceptance and which takes courageous positions in the public sphere. At the same time it is a story of anxiety about the uncertainty of where the UCA is heading, of the sense of burden of those leaders particularly those in their thirties, forties and fifties, of the small numbers of young children, teenagers and young adults, of not enough intentional examples of mentoring and engagement of younger people and

of a desire to have an even stronger voice in the pressing issues of our times like climate change.

The outgoing President of the UCA, Dr Deidre Palmer began the conference with her opening keynote address “Creating Christian communities of welcome, hope and liberation: the voice, presence and actions of young adults shaping the present and future of the Uniting Church in Australia”. Over her time as President, 100 youth and young adults have been involved in national “Around the Table” conversations.

“Young adults are not a monolithic group—they have unique experiences and stories to share” Deidre said. “Over the past three years, as I have served as President, it has been a privilege for me to sit with young people across the Uniting Church and listen to their stories of faith, discernment and of their vision of following Christ in a world that holds many challenges, complexities and possibilities”. It was clear from her presentation that “Around the Table” had resulted in a vibrant collective conversation expressing gratitude alongside a naming of deep longings for the possibility for change and a greater intentional expression of a public voice. There are deeply significant insights here and voices to be heard and Deidre will be presenting her report to the Assembly highlighting these.

On Friday night after Deidre’s keynote address we were presented with a musical feast. The Tongan community from Mascot Wesley Uniting Church Choir offered us wonderful hymns followed by a group of younger people from the same congregation singing contemporary songs. There was joy and passion in this expression of intergenerational singing.

On Saturday morning another powerful keynote address “Growing up Uniting: an inside out perspective” was presented by Dr Ruth Powell, Director NCLS Research. Ruth has managed the five-yearly National Church Life Survey (embracing all mainstream denominations) from 1991 to the present. Ruth sees herself as “the custodian of this data story”, a role giving her a unique perspective “reflecting on the life and history of the UCA.”

Ruth speaks of this “data story” as “a snapshot of lived religion” which reveals embedded specific

narratives. One is all too familiar. The UCA has declined in numbers in particular younger members. It has moved from the third largest denomination in Australia to the fifth largest. Ruth notes how the embracing of multiculturalism is now a defining characteristic of the UCA. A quarter of its members were born overseas and a third of Uniting Churches are involved with migrant ministry. A significant positive consequence Ruth notes is “multicultural is more healthy than mono-cultural leadership”.

On Saturday afternoon there was a session “Growing Up Uniting: Insights to Ponder; Lessons to Heed” presented by Drs William Emilsen and Elizabeth Watson, co-editors of *Growing Up Uniting*, a collection of reflections by 20 writers who have grown up in the UCA. The editors’ observations were also based on a focus group which had an in-depth conversation pondering specific questions about their experience of the UC.

One of the prompts for the overall project William explained was “the developing concern about what the UC has done, or is not doing, for its young people”. His and Elizabeth’s aim was to investigate the religious experience of people (aged, roughly, between their late teens and mid-forties) who have grown up within the Uniting Church in Australia”. The writers were encouraged to “tell their story in their own way”.

Three factors were named as most valued by the writers about growing up in the Uniting Church: mentoring, belonging and “the recognition, acceptance and appreciation early in one’s faith journey that the Uniting Church is different from many other churches”. Key examples of this difference were Open Table and the honouring of women in ministry. One of the specific things to come out of the separate focus group was a sense that the experience of COVID had heightened the importance of church as community, as a place of belonging. As one person said, “People crave community!” The emphasis was on shared time and space, a place where “the Spirit can touch people’s hearts” and the value of “creating a space where people are able to be honest about where they are at and able to explore difficulties”.

After this presentation the Reverend Charissa Suli in a speech full of hope and optimism declared Growing Up Uniting launched!

A panel of young leaders on Saturday evening—singer/songwriter Rachel Collis, ministers Adrian and Radhika Sukumar-White and Viliami Fililava together with chair Matagi Vilitama discussed their experiences of identity, culture and ethnicity, formation, creative expression and ministry. This was followed by a lively expression of musical gifts and original compositions with Rachel Collis, Radhika and Adrian Sukumar-White and Andrew and Ellie Elia singing and modelling songs for us.

At the Sunday service the Rev. Ellie Elia led worship with thoughtful feeling. Musical offerings included Brendon Lukin playing a Bach Prelude and Postlude and collective singing of songs composed by Roxanne McLeod and Andrew and Julian Elia. Judith Raftery led the Prayers of the People.

The Rev. Peter Walker, Principal of United Theological College preached on Genesis 28: 10–16 the story of Jacob’s dream. Calling his sermon ‘A Strange Place’ he offered some thought-provoking theological insights. He suggested the Uniting Church “is in ‘a strange place’ where we are like Jacob”. Peter reminded us that “the identity and activity of the Church throughout time and place, that is to say, who we are called to be and what we are called to do, changes surprisingly little across the waves of history”. He offered this challenge: “Yet we do need to change. Our situatedness demands it. But how can we think wisely and well about change from this strange place in which we find ourselves?”

Peter proposed that what we need is “innovators rather than inventors. Inventors are trying to make a new something. Innovators already have something (a precious something) that they wish to make new”. He reminded us of the charge Davis McCaughey preached in the inaugural service of the Uniting Church on 22 June 1977 “to bear witness afresh to the gospel of the day”. Peter added that “to fulfil this mission well requires a deep understanding of yesterday, and a bold imagination for tomorrow”.

A practical demonstration of ways to encourage “a deeper understanding of yesterday” was demonstrated in a session on Archives by enthusiastic contributions from Assembly Archivist Christine Gordon, NT Archives

volunteer, Judy Orme, and SA local historian Judy Eland. Many other interesting papers and discussions took place in parallel sessions with multiple “growing up Uniting” narratives in for example the diaconate, LGBTIQ identities and networks, growing up Uniting for young Tongans and Fijians given voice in a session called “Talanoa” (conversation), Young Ambassadors for Peace, growing up SAFE, redesigning ‘home’— ‘Space for Grace’ for CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities and the experience of joining the UCA from other faith traditions. On Sunday afternoon pianist and composer Douglas Simper along with his wife vocalist and artist Lorna led a workshop featuring songs from his collection *Singing in the Journey* recently launched in South Australia.

There was no and there can be no “last word” in the struggles for the UCA to continue “to bear witness afresh to the gospel of the day”. But a lively word was offered by Richard La’Brooy, a history teacher and the chaplain at Newington College. In “Growing Up and Growing Young – Ministry in the UC as a Stained Glass Millennial” he asked “Why stay? Why now? Why be part of a movement that is slowing down?” Richard suggests, “The key to ministry to young people is not in programs but in relationships”. He spoke about the impact of social media with the possibility of “having hundreds of followers’ but perhaps “very few friends”. The challenge is “to walk beside young people”.

The conference ended as it began with a belief that the exchange of ideas about the shared experience of the history of the UCA and rich conversation and creative music and worship can show some pointers to real hopes for the future. Good conferences do not happen without much hard work and the work of the Committee of the UCNHS is to be honoured.

Perhaps it is true to suggest that history has something to say and that there is an unbreakable thread that binds the past, present and future of the journeys of the pilgrim people of the Uniting Church if only we can embrace “a deep understanding of yesterday and a bold imagination for tomorrow”.

Carolyn is a member of the UCNHS. She worked for several years as a Lecturer in Critical Reasoning (CSU) and Study Skills Tutor teaching students at United Theological College. A trained Spiritual Director, and member of the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction, Carolyn is committed to creating contemplative space through retreats and Taize services. She lives in Leura with William where they are members of Leura Uniting Church.

The 2021 conference—a Zoom perspective

by Alison Longworth

I participated in the 2021 UCNHS Conference sitting alongside my husband Robin on Whadjuk Noongar country in Western Australia. This report is from a Zoom perspective. Thank you, William Emilsen, Patricia Curthoys and members of the planning committee for organising this conference, made more difficult by Covid-19, and thank you for enabling the option of participating via Zoom. Zooming from a different time zone required some additional planning around meal breaks, but these were only minor issues compared to a very stimulating conference.

To begin the proceedings, Society President Glen O’Brien, gave a Zoom welcome from Victoria. It was helpful to have Glen conversing in the chat room, enabling some conversation amongst Zoom participants while Damian Palmer’s technical support guided those less confident with the technology.

The Friday night opening address by UCA President Dr Deidre Palmer, shared information from eight round table discussions with young adults that provided insight into what young people value, what concerns them and what they wish for within the Uniting Church. From a Zoom perspective, the use of PowerPoint slides and photographs was useful, but it was disappointing that the camera was not placed to receive a good view of the speaker. Similarly, for much of the presentation by the Mascot Wesley Church Choir, Zoom participants could enjoy the singing, but for much of the presentation we saw only empty chairs in the auditorium until eventually the camera was turned towards the choir.

Early Saturday morning Perth time, I was ready to participate via Zoom in devotions in the chapel. How disappointing that no allowance was made for Zoom participants.

The keynote presentation by Dr Ruth Powell on *Growing up Uniting: an inside out perspective* was well presented, informative and insightful. It began by sharing the presenter's personal background within the Uniting Church and then presented information from within the National Church Life Survey. By then the camera was better placed for presentations and PowerPoint slides were used to great advantage.

William Emilsen and Elizabeth Watson shared many insights from the anonymous focus group drawn together for the research topic of *Growing Up Uniting*. This session was followed by the book launch of their publication *Growing Up Uniting* which includes personal accounts from the generation of people who have experienced their formation within the Uniting Church. Thank you for preparing this valuable resource.

The presentations provided a variety of topics on the theme. (Continued p. 8)

Wesley Church Perth 150th Anniversary Celebrations were held on Sunday 30 May 2021, which was deferred due to Covid19 from 2020.

A special morning service featured a greeting from the UCA Assembly President Deidre Palmer and our Moderator Susy Thomas as guest preacher. A celebration service followed at 2.30pm with the President as our guest preacher. Afternoon tea was served in the church after the service. Both services included special music from the Wesley Choir and Wesley music scholars.

It has been one hundred and fifty years since Wesley Church was opened, and 190 years since the first Methodist congregation was established in WA.



William Emilsen

William Emilsen retired from the Board of the UCNHS following the 2021 AGM. On behalf of the Board, we acknowledge the great contribution he has made to the establishment and successful operation of the UCNHS.

William and Patricia Curthoys were asked by the Assembly to negotiate with state UCA history societies with a view to establishing the national society, and this came to fruition in 2017 with the first conference in Adelaide.

Ordained in 1980, he served in various NSW parishes. In 1993 William began teaching Church History at United Theological College. The following year, with his late wife, Susan, he initiated a new course called 'Uniting Church Studies' and then the year after he established the journal *Uniting Church Studies* which he edited for 20 years until his retirement in 2014. At various times he was appointed Vice Principal and Academic Dean at the College. He was also a founding member of 'The Publicans', a small group of academics that established courses in Public Theology and sparked widespread interest in the subject in Australia. In 2005 he was appointed Associated Professor of Church History in the Sydney College of Divinity and similarly when the College became part of the School of Theology at Charles Sturt University.

William has authored many papers and books, based on his wide interests, with his major area of research being the Uniting Church. Other areas of research and writing have been in the story of Gandhi, Christian spirituality, and Aboriginal history. In the latter area he has documented the early history of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, written the history of the first Methodist mission on Warruwi or Goulburn Island, and biographies of the Rev. Lazarus Lamilami, the first ordained Aboriginal Methodist Minister in Australia and the Rev. Charles Harris, a founder and first President of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. In part, he sees his historical work on writing Aboriginal stories as a kind of atonement for the past mistreatment of Indigenous people.

Often these were from personal experience rather than historical research. They were useful in developing our understanding of the Uniting Church particularly from a younger generation and a variety of cultures. With several streams occurring at the same time, it was not possible to take in all presentations and so this is not a comprehensive report of all aspects of the conference. I would like to have heard Margaret Reeson's case study of the Young Ambassadors for Peace Program, but it was at the same time as my own presentation, via Zoom, on the history of a congregation growing up Uniting from 1978 to the present time. I appreciated Dean Eland's presentation *Growing up into Union* focused on the representatives to the first UCA Assembly. His vision of building a UCA Dictionary of Biography seems like a worthwhile project to document the stories of the first generation of UCA leaders and beyond.

I asked Robin to share the highlight of the Conference for him and he suggested Damien Palmer's presentation: *On (Not) Growing up Uniting*. Damien spoke of early denominational influences in his life and then shared that he ended up in the Uniting Church through the impact of the Basis of Union particularly Paragraph 11 which pictures the Uniting Church open to the broad inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry, the world-wide fellowship of churches and contemporary thought. He described Paragraph 13, with its affirmation of the gifts of every member of the church as central to his thinking and teaching.

In contrast, presenter Richard La' Brooy, is a Millennial who has grown up in the Uniting Church and chose to stay. Using his personal experience and his current ministry as a school chaplain Richard cited Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union in that we are a people of Resurrection and Pentecost. He urged his listeners to prioritise young people and show care. Clearly, the Basis of Union is a document that continues to inspire and challenge.

Something quite different was Christine Gordon's report on the Archives, including some sharing of different treasures from around the Synods. It was so interesting. Even via Zoom, I was moved to

see the original artwork for the Covenanting Poster.

Sunday worship was held in the auditorium, and Zoom participants were able to participate. It provided meaningful liturgy, music and proclamation. I thought more attention could have been given to Zoom participants by providing PowerPoint slides of hymns and prayers.

As a Zoom participant I missed the face-to-face interactions, but it would be good to continue to offer this option in the future for those unable to attend in person. It was certainly much cheaper and more environmentally sustainable than a long flight across the continent. Opportunities were provided for Zoom participants to join in the question times and more could be made of this in future. Handouts, including worship orders of service and copies of PowerPoint slides sent out via email at the time of presentation would be appreciated. A promotion from the book desk could have resulted in more book sales from Zoom participants.

My copy of *Growing Up Uniting* has now arrived by snail mail, and I am looking forward to the publication of the Conference Proceedings later in the year. Thank you again for a thought-provoking conference.

The Rev. Dr Alison Longworth has been a member of the Board of the Uniting Church National History Society since its formation in 2017. Before her retirement Alison served in the Western Australian Synod as a parish minister for twelve years followed by eight years as an aged-care chaplain. From 1994 Alison has been involved with the covenanting process between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. That commitment is reflected in her doctoral research into the encounter of women missionaries with the Noongar people of south-west Australia. More recent research includes the chapter "Alice Mofflin: A Woman of Outstanding Merit" published in *Out of the Ordinary: Twelve Australian Methodist Biographies* edited by Patricia Curthoys and William Emilsen and "Chaplain Diggins and the Western Australian Presbyterian Evangelistic Campaign of 1958", an article focused on the writer's father and published in *Church Heritage*, September 2016.

THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021: 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMING OF THE LIGHT TO THE TORRES STRAIT.

The London Missionary Society (or the Society (LMS), Congregational) brought the gospel to the islands of the Torres Strait and later the Anglican Church and ministers of other denominations continued to provide ministry to local people. In July 1871, the Reverend Samuel MacFarlane (1837–1911), a Scottish-born Congregationalist who was ordained to missionary service by the LMS on 11 November 1858, anchored at Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Strait accompanied by South Sea Islander evangelists and teachers. Missionaries thoroughly converted the local people of the Torres Strait to Christianity and helped to reduce exploitation in the maritime industry.

Each year, Torres Strait Islanders of all Christian denominations living on the islands or on the mainland mark this anniversary with great celebrations. Activities include church services, a re-enactment of the landing at Kemus on Erub, hymn-singing, feasting and *Ailan dans* (island dance).

Events that may be held in the islands of the Torres Strait are led by local church leaders of different denominations particularly the Anglican Church under the oversight of Bishop Keith Joseph, Diocese of North Queensland. In 2020, the Melanesian Brotherhood, the world's largest Anglican religious order that has its headquarters in the Solomon Islands, established a household on Thursday Island, which aims to support ministry across the islands of the Torres Strait. Through the Anglican Board of Mission (ABM), the Diocese seeks to raise \$50,000 in 2021 to cover expenses. The ABM regards the Coming of the Light as "not simply an historic event", rather "it is an invitation for all of us to be changed by the work of God in the Torres Strait".

Events led from Mackay: For the past twenty years, Ps Peter Lister, Slade Point Christian Church, Mackay, has run an annual mission trip for thirty

people to the islands of Torres Strait to coincide with the anniversary of the Coming of the Light. A commemorative event was held in Mackay on Thursday 1 July 2021 at 1pm re-enactment, 2pm service, 3pm feast, Holy Trinity Anglican Church and grounds, Mackay. In Brisbane, the Torres Strait Islander Anglican Non-Geographical Parish largely worshipping at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Fortitude Valley ran various activities. The South-East Queensland Torres Strait Islander community hosted a four-day festival from 1–4 July at [Colmslie Recreational Reserve](#), which became a mini-Torres Strait Island village with historic photos, storytelling, cultural workshops, food tasting and more. The Brisbane City Council held an event at the Queen Street Mall stage from 12noon–1pm on 1 July.

Patricia Curthoys

Patricia Curthoys retired from the Board of the UCNHS following the 2021 AGM. On behalf of the Board, we acknowledge the great contribution she has made to the establishment and successful operation of the UCNHS.

Patricia Curthoys is a professional historian, with a PhD in Australian history from the University of New South Wales. She is an Associate of the Centre for Applied History, Macquarie University. She has mainly published in the area of Australian religious history, including co-editing with William Emilsen, *Out of the Ordinary: Twelve Australian Methodist Biographies* (2015) and co-authoring, with others, *Pride of Place: A History of the Pitt Street Congregational Church* (2008). Patricia had been a member of the Assembly's Historical Reference Committee for several years before its disbandment in 2015. She then worked with William Emilsen to help create the Uniting Church National History Society, which was inaugurated at the first UCA national history conference in Adelaide in 2017. Since then she has served as both a co-opted and elected member of the UCNHS Board as well as being a member of the 2021 UCNHS Conference Planning Committee.

Quarantine restrictions

The local board of health has restricted all congregations to nineteen or under, no matter what the air space of the building. On Sunday night we preached as best we could to congregations of nineteen in as many rooms as could hear the preacher's voice. Those over the number had to be contented with seats in the porches or to stand outside the building and listen at the windows. Both preacher and people smarted at these irksome restrictions. It seemed so silly to allow nineteen people to pack into a vestibule, or a small vestry, and only allow the same number to meet in a church with upwards of 1,000 feet of floor space.

Beer or bibles?

The church folk were disgusted to see crowds of men standing around hotel bars, where they were admitted in numbers corresponding to the floor space in front of the bars. But those who preferred spiritual refreshment from the preached word were not allowed similar facilities for gathering together. A decided preference seemed to be given to beer. Was it because it was a business transaction and "money talks"? Or was it that the authorities placed little importance on the use of Bibles and the consolations of religion in such days as these?

Sound familiar? These issues were raised by the Rev. W.T. Shapley, Superintendent of the Port Pirie Central Mission, in 1919, in his report to the Methodist paper, *The Australian Christian Commonwealth*. The 'irksome' circumstances to which he refers were occasioned by the Spanish influenza pandemic.

Judith Raftery, commenting on these 100 year old statements in the June edition of Uniting History SA's June newsletter, wrote about how familiar these complaints sound to those we keep hearing today from some quarters of society. Recognising that issues such as these in a pandemic are always complex, she finished: "As Christians, committed to abundant life for all, and as people prepared to be informed by history, I believe we are called to value compassion and the common good over individual rights, and to examine our own stances in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and requirements—however irksome—in the light of that."

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)

A note from the treasurer

Dear members, I am pleased to report that the majority of you have paid your 2021 membership fees. Thank you.

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!

