

Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 5 No. 3 September 2023

YES

*This is our opportunity to recognise and
respond to 200 years of history in this land.*

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FROM THE CHAIR

Dr Judith Raftery

Greetings to all members of the Uniting Church National History Society. It is an honour and a pleasure to be able to write to you in my new role as Chair of the Board of the UCNHS. I am the third person to take on this role, following our inaugural chair, William Emilsen and immediate past-chair, Glen O'Brien. I am looking forward to building on the fine contributions they made to establish the society as a strong and respected voice for the preservation and analysis of the history of the Uniting Church and its predecessor denominations, and hope that many of you too will be actively engaged in this ongoing process.

As you are aware, our fourth biennial conference was held recently in Darwin. It was a great success and we are very grateful to the planning and organising group – Gwenda Baker, Wendy Beresford-Maning, Lauren Merritt, Judy Orme, Steve Orme and Gwen Warmbirrirr – for their vision, hard work, and excellent organising capacities, which made it all happen. Apart from lovely weather, excellent venues and catering at Darwin Memorial Uniting Church and Nungalinga College, and a good roll up (approximately 65, mostly face-to-face, but also some via Zoom) of participants, including a contingent from Mililingimbi, the other standout feature of the conference was the theme: 'Truth-telling: colonising to covenanting'. This not only accommodated genuine historical enquiry but also resonated strongly with the current social and political climate. I believe there is an important message in this for organisers of future conferences: choose a theme that can lend coherence to the whole conference, by encouraging historical analysis and by connecting to the present and the future.

At our recent AGM there was a question about how 'ordinary' members can be more involved with the UCNHS. The obvious answer is: attend our biennial conferences, participate in our periodic webinars, and read our regular newsletter. But it is understandable that many would see these as quite limited options for involvement – and you may already be doing all of them anyway. I have two other suggestions:

- First, get in touch with the UCNHS, perhaps through the newsletter (the Editor would love to receive a letter from you!) with some suggestions of your own about what you would like to see the UCNHS involved in, and what you might contribute to that.
- Second, find some others of like mind and get involved in some local project that involves the UCA over time—e.g. the growth or decline or reimagining of local congregations; local church agencies or enterprises that are blossoming or in decline; current cooperation between the UCA and other church groups where once there was none (or the opposite).

The possibilities are endless, and what you might discover will be of interest to others and help build a more nuanced picture of who the UCA is and where it is headed.

Sharon Hollis, the President of the National Assembly, has said that through its commitment to exploring its history in such a way as to illuminate the present and the future, the UCNHS is a gift to whole of the UCA. We say "Amen!" to that. We don't do history for history's sake. We aren't antiquarians or just enthusiasts about the past. We recognise the value of personal stories, but aren't content with stories that lack context and analysis. We embrace the challenge that was reiterated at the 150th anniversary of Darwin Memorial Uniting Church: honour the past, transform the present, create the future. We hope you'll find ways to join us in that mission.

Judith Raftery

Chair of the UCNHS Board Chair, Uniting Church National History Society

PRESBYTERIANS AND LAW RELATING TO MARRIAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES: 1826–1855

Dr Barry Bridges

From the time that John Dunmore Lang was the sole Presbyterian minister in New South Wales (NSW) through the mid-1850s Presbyterian claims to legal equality with the Church of England revolved around the right to solemnise marriages. Later, when the colonial Presbyterian Church split into several contending divisions, the matter was complicated by the question of whether all of these had equal rights.

On a practical level the right to perform marriages was of great importance. Some of the voluntarist ministers in the early 1850s depended very heavily on marriage fees for their income. Synod of Australian ministers found the fees a welcome addition to their small government stipends, rarely augmented to any considerable extent by their congregations.

Clergy taking a sacramental view of marriage generally refused to marry couples without some religious test and might attempt to impose a qualifying period of attendance at church for those unknown to them. In a society where indifferentism, nominalism or outright irreligion were common many couples found this attitude irksome and, if possible, preferred to avoid confronting such demands. They resorted to Presbyterian ministers who, conceiving marriage to be in the nature of a civil contract, were willing to perform weddings without catechism or conditions, so long as the demands of the civil law were met. Presbyterian ministers in effect served as civil celebrants prior to the introduction of registry marriage and they commanded a disproportionate share of the 'marriage market'.

Anglican and Catholic prelates forbade their priests to perform marriage between Europeans and Aborigines unless the Aborigine, invariably the female, was a baptised Christian. Consequently, nearly all of the non-European Aboriginal marriages were performed by the Presbyterian ministers.^[1]

With regard to baptism there was a noticeable reversal. Many more or less nominal Presbyterians presented their babies at an episcopal font rather than submit to the catechising of the more serious ministers.^[2]

Lang obtained local recognition of his right to perform marriage ceremonies when he noticed that a British Act gave Church of Scotland ministers the right to marry within the diocese of Calcutta. The Archdeaconry of NSW currently formed part of the see of Calcutta. He established this right against the firm opposition of the local head of the Church of England, Archdeacon T.H. Scott.

By an 1826 Act of Council (6 Geo.IV, No. 21), the Established (Anglican) minister of a parish was made the official registrar of births, baptisms, marriages and burials. Clergy of other denominations performing any of these services were to forward a certificate and a fee of one shilling to the Established minister. Lang resisted.

Lang's early colleagues, likewise ministers of the Church of Scotland, exercised their right to marry with circumspection, attempting to avoid antagonising the Anglicans by not performing marriages unless at least one of a couple identified as Presbyterian. In 1831 Scott's successor, Archdeacon W.G. Broughton, made a formal complaint to the government about the Rev. John McGarvie marrying two Church of England couples. McGarvie always manifested the traditional Scottish eagerness to avoid antagonising members of the Church of England. In a rather abject reply he assured "His Excellency that such care will be exercised in future as will prevent the recurrence of any case of a similar kind".^[3]

In the 1830s the notion took root that Scottish clergy were entitled to perform marriages as *Presbyterian* ministers, and later comers who were not ministers of the Church of Scotland married applicants as a matter of course. The Rev. William Ritchie, a minister of the United Secession denomination, told a Select Committee of the Legislative Council in 1847 that "marriage is simply an agreement between two parties and the minister does nothing, in fact, but witness it, and declare that it has taken place". He did not know what the local law was. He simply proceeded as he had always done in

Scotland. He did not require the farce under 5WmIV No 2 S2 of having the parties about to be married declare that they held communion with the Presbyterian Church.^[4] Probably no other minister would have so frankly avowed adherence in practice to his own views—but few seem to have concerned themselves with the letter of the law.

In 1834 the Legislative Council passed an Act legitimising certain marriages not in conformity with Lord Hardwicke's Act, the English statute governing matrimony, or the common law. In the key common law case, *The Queen v Millis*, it had been decided that a contract *per verba de praesenti*, in this case exchange of vows before and Irish Presbyterian minister, conferred the right on one party to compel sacramental marriage by a priest of an episcopal Church. The judges arrived at their decision in relation to the statute. Their judgement left undetermined whether a marriage contract *per verba de praesenti* was valid under the common law.

Because English law applied in NSW so far as was consistent with the circumstances of the colony, the decision in *The Queen v Millis* caused great confusion as to the state of the law regarding marriage. Were marriages solemnised before Protestant or non-Christian clerics valid or only those where Anglican or Catholic priests officiated?^[5] Presbyterians, ministers and laymen, took a leading role in a long struggle to clarify the situation by establishing the principle that marriage is a civil contract unrelated for legal purposes to any theological concept.^[6] They were to receive powerful aid from Henry Parkes' newspaper, the *Empire*, after its commencement in 1850.

Presbyterians were in a somewhat less doubtful position than others because their rights derived from their Synod's association with the Established Church of Scotland. In February 1842 the Rev. John Dunmore Lang resigned from the Synod of Australia but continued to marry couples on the basis of his status as a minister of the Church of Scotland, unperturbed by a press campaign calling into question the validity of his marriages.^[7]

In June 1844 Lang introduced into the legislature a Bill to remove doubts about the validity of marriages by a Methodist splinter group. This

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).

encountered opposition and was withdrawn.^[8] Shortly afterwards Charles Cowper introduced an abortive Marriage Regulation Bill.^[9]

In 1847 J.F.L. Foster brought in as a private measure, at the request of the 'Free Church' Synod of Australia Felix, a Presbyterian Free Church Marriage Bill for the purpose of removing doubts about the legality of marriages performed by its ministers. The Synod of Eastern Australia, similarly a 'Free Church' organ, sought a broadening of the terms of the Bill to cover it.^[10] The Rev. John McGarvie told the Select Committee on the Bill that he believed that all Presbyterian ministers were covered by existing legislation and that enactment of the proposed measure was unnecessary. The Rev. William Ritchie thought that as there prevailed a tacit assumption of the validity of all Presbyterian marriages it was unwise raise doubts.^[11]

Foster reintroduced the Bill during the 1848 session of the Legislative Council, but it lapsed when the House was counted out on the notice for the second reading.^[12] Foster tried a third time in 1849 in response to continuing appeals from the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia Felix. This time members of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and Lang and his congregation petitioned for rejection of the Bill and institution of a general system of registration so that the contract of marriage would rest on a civil basis. The Bill was defeated.^[13]

The situation was greatly exacerbated by the decision of the Supreme Court of NSW in *The Queen v Roberts* in 1848. Roberts married in Yass in a ceremony conducted by an Anglican priest. While his wife by this marriage was still alive Roberts went through a form of marriage with a second woman before the Rev. John McGarvie. The validity of this second, bigamous, marriage was impugned on the ground that all the requirements of the Act of Council had not been complied with and that tried by the decision in *The Queen v Millis* the second so-called marriage was void at common law. On this issue being raised a committee of citizens anxious to have the matters settled once and for all retained counsel. The issue was evaded when the judges found that as the first marriage was still valid the second could not be, whether considered of itself it was or was not.^[14] The question had been raised as to whether non-Episcopalian Protestant marriages

were valid. The Court had not given an answer. The judge in the minority gave his opinion that all colonial marriages performed with words of assent and consent were valid and that no want of technicality or qualification in the officiating person could render them otherwise.^[15]

Marriages performed by Church of Scotland ministers were covered by statute and were therefore valid against the common law test. However, by this time few of the colony's Presbyterian clergy were ministers of the Church of Scotland and were left in limbo along with all other Protestant and non-Christian clergy. It was said that one man married by a Presbyterian minister was so disturbed by the decision in Roberts' case that he consulted a barrister of repute, who advised that his marriage was invalid.^[16]

The "Synod of Australia in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland" (to give it its full name) was naturally concerned by the decision in Roberts' case. On 6 February 1850 it appointed a committee of its leading members to prepare an address for circulation in NSW

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setting forth the inalienable right of its ministers to solemnise marriages independent of any local statute and the “grievous oppression and injury” they would suffer if, after enjoying that right without challenge, that right was to be taken away from them “by any pretence or fiction of law”. The committee was to memorialise the Governor and to seek to have the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland interest itself in the matter and solicit the passing of Imperial legislation placing their rights on a footing of “inviolable security”.^[17]

The subject was referred to the Church of Scotland.^[18] When no answer was received a reminder was sent emphasising the importance of the General Assembly memorialising the Secretary of State for the Colonies requesting an instruction to the Colonial Government to protect the rights of Presbyterian ministers and to place them on an equal footing with those of the Church of England.^[19]

As a consequence of the Roberts decision, the Legislative Council late in 1850 passed a short declaratory Act, *14 Vic. No. 28*, validating all marriages, despite technical objections, based on any existing laws, to the date of enactment 1 October 1850. It was clear that the framers of the measure did not wish for it to have future application. The issue as an ongoing problem was left unresolved.

The Act was framed by the Attorney-General John Hubert Plunkett, the most distinguished Catholic layman in NSW, who was known to be strongly committed personally to his Church’s sacramental view of marriage and to consider Presbyterian marriage a mockery.^[20]

The Rev. Barzillai Quaife put the Presbyterian view when he wrote:

Nothing is itself simpler, nothing more rudimentary in society than marriage, and there never was any difficulty about it till the incongruous notion was resorted to, that none but sacred hands were fit to bind the contract.^[21]

Presbyterians were conscious that the institution of marriage is both older and wider than the reach of Christianity. The Catholic Church itself did not see priestly involvement as necessary until late in its period of existence.

The *Empire* urged that

Nothing but an unmistakable declaration that marriage is to be considered in the eye of the law as a mere civil contract, requiring only the same evidence in its support as any other contract, will ever give satisfaction.... Let those who will, have sacramental matrimony, and let those who will, dispense with it.^[22]

A lay Presbyterian committee on marriage law was formed in Sydney. Donald MacPherson, Lang’s right-hand man as Session Clerk, was the honorary secretary and impelling spirit. The committee produced a printed letter on “The Colonial Marriage Laws”, written by MacPherson and addressed to the Rev. Dr Young of Perth, Scotland. When this letter was placed before Lang’s Synod of NSW to enlist its support this was denied when Lang objected to appealing to any ecclesiastical body in Scotland for anything “as they had all proved themselves utterly wanting in interest for Australia”.^[23]

Nevertheless, some interest was aroused in Scotland. MacPherson’s chief, Cluny MacPherson of Cluny Castle, Invernesshire, placed the letter in the hands of an MP who promised to gather support within the House of Commons and to place any petition got up in the colony in the hands of the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, if Presbyterian rights were not fully secured through a projected new constitution Act for NSW.^[24] The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland petitioned Parliament through the Duke of Argyll for a declaratory Act restraining application of the common law to the colonies.^[25] At the beginning of 1852 the Free Church of Scotland’s Colonial Committee took up the cause, urging the Commission of the General Assembly, and later the full General Assembly, to memorialise the Government and Parliament for an extension to the British colonies in general of the Indian Marriage Act.^[26] Early in 1853 a deputation interviewed Lord Aberdeen and the Duke of Newcastle and were told that satisfactory legislation was in contemplation.^[27] In mid-1852 the supreme body of the Irish Presbyterian Church decided to petition the Government in support of the Presbyterian colonists.^[28]

Mything bits (did you get 'em?)

Myth, a bad word

For our polties,

A crucial good word

For story lovers.

Life's Mysteries, Deep Truth,

hidden in colourful, maybe fantastic,

story garb, parable,

pity statement.

Jesus arrives.

The lame leap for joy.

So too travellers

On their Road to the isles.

The Biblical sun stands still.

No miracle of a natural kind.

On Blueberry Hill,

Moon stands still.

With mythic mind to the fore,

Enter through Imagination's door.

Walk a mythic way

Over mountains of trouble,

On the tempestuous sea,

The mythic spirit, in you, in me.

Sinbard O'Higgins (Ian Higgins) 27/3/23

On no other issue were the colony's Presbyterians so active in defence of their denomination's rights. No doubt because the problems raised by the decision of *The Queen v Millis* applied to the British colonies in general nothing else raised a like degree of sympathetic concern in Scotland and Ulster.

Under pressure, the colonial Government introduced into the Legislative Council a Bill to Regulate Marriages early in December 1851. It provided for marriage by a deputy registrar as well as by ministers of religion. The Bill contained a number of features unsatisfactory to Presbyterians, some of them indicative of Plunkett's antagonism. The term 'officiating minister' included "duly ordained ministers of any established branch of the Presbyterian Church". However, the interpretation clause spoke of ordained ministers of the Church of Scotland. Apart from the conflict, the narrower interpretation offended by making the validity of a marriage dependent on an event which had occurred in Scotland and could be authenticated there. A marriage was to be celebrated in a church or chapel registered under terms of the Bill. This was contrary to Presbyterian practice. It would render marriage by a minister impossible in many parts of the country. Finally, in what was a palpable hit for the Presbyterian clergy, although presented as a means for preventing unscrupulous clergy trafficking in marriage for the sake of the fees, it was proscribed that at least one of the parties to the marriage was to be a member of the Church of the officiating minister and sign a declaration to that effect.^[29]

One Presbyterian layman writing to the press warned that although his co-denominationalist would accept some terms requiring alteration of their customs they required perfect justice for all or they would "drive a carriage and four" through the Bill and leave Plunkett and the Governor to clean up the mess through indemnity bills.^[30]

In 1852 a revised version of the Marriage Bill was brought in. The Synod of NSW contended strongly for a view of marriage as a civil contract and objected strenuously to any attempt to place it on a religious ground. Surprisingly, the favoured Synod of Australia took up a position antagonistic to Scottish tradition and Synod of NSW advocacy and accepted that the law might impose religious conditions.^[31] The Synod of Eastern Australia offered no opinion. In evidence before a Select Committee on the Bill, the Revs Barzillai Quaife (Synod of NSW) and Alexander



Salmon (Synod of Eastern Australia) both upheld the traditional Presbyterian concept that marriage is a civil contract. The attitude of the Rev. John McGarvie (Synod of Australia) did not emerge clearly.^[32]

In his second reading, Plunkett expressed his opinion that Presbyterian ministers' disproportionate share of the marriage 'market' was improper. He complained that they rendered banns a farce, often publishing them three times on one day, giving "a facility for clandestine marriages", which were universally regarded as leading to misery and fraud.^[33] It is relevant that over a long period Presbyterian ministers had near monopoly of prosecutions for breaches of marriage laws.

With the failure of Plunkett's two marriage bills the problems relating to marriage continued unabated. The *Empire* complained in 1854 that "all the entreaties in the world seemed insufficient to induce the legislature to put an end to the doubts by passing a law".^[34]

On 1 August 1855 Plunkett introduced his third bill. This declared that

... no marriage shall be celebrated, except by some duly-qualified or ordinarily officiating minister of religion, whose name, designation, and usual residence shall have been, within twelve months next before the marriage, registered in the office of the Registrar General.

Application did not extend to Quakers or Jews.^[35] James Martin, a Catholic barrister and future Premier and Chief Justice, mistakenly contended that an amended marriage law had been called for only by Presbyterians in consequence of their wilful disobedience of the existing laws. The legislature ought not to humour them. Martin showed no awareness that Presbyterian ministers who were not of the Church of Scotland were outside the protection of the law as it stood—as were Primitive Methodists, Quakers, Jews and any other non-Christians. Parkes' *Empire* insisted that it was "not a Presbyterian question at all, but a question touching the essential nature of man, and his rights in society".^[36]

Plunkett's third Marriage Bill passed into law as the Act 19 Vic. No.30, 30 November 1855. It settled matters by making proof of marriage a matter of registration and in effect a civil contract, although one requiring religious rites whether or not the parties were believers.

Marriage statistics reveal the importance for Presbyterian ministers of the right to perform lawful marriages and the desire of the people to engage the services of ministers with no desire to impose conditions on them. In the ten years from 1834 to 1844 Presbyterian ministers performed 1,806 weddings compared with 2,254 by Catholic priests although the Catholic population was two and a half times the Presbyterian population. In the year ending 1 July 1853 the disproportion, at 435 marriages to 553, was even greater. In this year Wesleyans, with nearly the same proportion of the total population as Presbyterians, had only 93 weddings. On average over a three year period the Church of England performed 700 marriages per year compared to 435 for Presbyterians, who had only one-fifth as many adherents.^[37] In 1862 the percentage of marriages performed by Presbyterian ministers was not only quite disproportionately high as nearly thirty percent but absolutely higher than for the two large denominations.^[38] In Sydney where clergy of all persuasions were available, in 1864 Presbyterians performed 570 marriages, Catholics 290, and Anglicans only 139. In country districts the figures evened out a good deal^[39], probably because of the unavailability of Presbyterian ministers in some localities. The clear implication of the figures is that where couples had an effective choice, there had grown to be an overwhelming preference for Presbyterian marriage. There is also implied in the figures a good deal of nominalism in proclaimed denominational attachment.#

^[1] Barry Bridges, "The Racially Mixed Marriage to 1860", *Newsletter of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, No. 77, February 1969, 3–4.

^[2] *Empire*, 16 May 1857.

^[3] McGarvie to Colonial Secretary, 10/3/1831 31/1730, CSIL, AONSW 4/2125.5

^[4] Legislative Council, Report from the Select Committee on the Presbyterian Free Church

Marriage Bill, 7 September 1847, Evidence 3 Tait, 5–6 McGarvie, 8 Ritchie.

[51] *Empire*, 29 September 1851: the whole question of marriage surveyed.

[6] *Ibid*, 27 September 1853.

[7] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1842, letter from “Conjusc”, 15 & 19 December 1842, editorials, 7 January 1842, letter from “Civis”; *Australian*, 4 July 1842, letter from “Scotus”.

[8] V&PLC, 1844, vI, 39, 14 June 1844, 56, 27 June 1844; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 June 1844, editorial.

[9] V&PLC, 1844, vI, 101, 7 August 1844.

[10] These Presbyterian entities consisted of ministers and adherents who separated from any connection with the Established Church of Scotland at the disruption of the Synod of Australia in 1846.

[11] Report on the Presbyterian Free Church Marriage Bill, 1847, Evidence, 6 McGarvie, 8 Ritchie.

[12] V&PLC, 1848, 23, 28, 31, 84, 137.

[13] *Ibid*, 1849, vI, 66, 101, 133, 173, 174.

[14] *Empire*, 29 September 1851.

[15] *Ibid*, 4 June 1853.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 February 1850; Synod of Australia Minutes.

[18] Minutes of the Colonial Committee of the Church of Scotland (National Library of Scotland, Dep. 298), v10, 112, 28 August 1850.

[19] *Ibid*, 385–386, 18 February 1852.

[20] *Empire*, 29 September & 3 December 1851, 9 January 1852.

[21] *Ibid*, 9 August 1852, letter.

[22] 29 September 1852. This newspaper editorialised along these lines a number of times —e.g., 13 April & 10 June 1852, 27 September & 18 October 1854.

[23] Synod of NSW Minutes 1850–1864 (ML A2630), 48–49, 6 February 1851, 63, 5 March 1851.

[24] *Empire*, 30 May 1853, letter Cluny MacPherson to Donald MacPherson 24 January 1853.

[25] *Ibid*, 29 September 1856.

[26] Free Church of Scotland Colonial Committee Minutes (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Acc. 4633), v2, 122–123, 30 January 1852, 149, 18 May 1852.

[27] *Ibid*, 194, 19 October 1852; 243, 23 March 1853.

[28] *Ibid*, 170, 20 July 1852.

[29] *Empire*, 3 December 1851, editorial and text of the Bill. See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1847, Minutes of Synod of Australia where that body had objected to any restrictions of that kind.

[30] *Empire*, 27 December 1851, letter from “Publicola”.

[31] *Ibid*, 13 April 1852.

[32] Legislative Council, Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Marriage Laws, 28 December 1852; *Empire*, 3 & 7 February 1853, editorials.

[33] *Ibid*, 6 October 1853.

[34] *Ibid*, 18 October 1854,

[35] *Ibid*, 12 August 1855, Reports on Legislative Council proceedings, 6 August 1855, text of the bill.

[36] *Ibid*, 4 September 1855, editorial.

[37] *Ibid*, 6 October 1853: Attorney General’s speech in Legislative Council, 4 October 1853.

[38] Eighth Annual Report from the Registrar General, in V&PLA, 1864, vI, 341.

[39] Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths (Ninth Annual Report), 16, in V&PLA, 1865–6, vII.

Dr Barry Bridges lectured in history, government, politics and education and is the author of 19 publications, including a biographical register concerning the Presbyterian Church in eastern Australia from 1823 to 1865.

Out of the Archives

Each week material comes to the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Archives. Some things immediately spark the imagination, with many questions coming to mind. Records from Benalla came in and it was a couple of cuttings in the front of the Trustees Register that took our attention. They referred to the Rev. John Donnes, who, as the first Home Missionary appointed by the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria, came to start work at Benalla in 1875. He was born in Sydney in 1844 into a devout Greek Orthodox family. Members of the family were attracted to Methodism in Castlemaine and John at the age of 31, heard the call to serve as a Home Missionary. In 1883 he was received into the ministry but unfortunately died the following year.

One of the cuttings was a letter from John Donnes to the Rev. E. King describing the first year of his work at Benalla. The cutting comes from "The Spectator" of July 11 1884, some time after his death.

Wesleyan Parsonage, Benalla, 17th July, 1876.

My DEAR BROTHER—Your favour came duly to hand, and I haste to give you the desired information. I have been laid by for nearly two weeks, otherwise I should have written a few days earlier. .

I have been here fifteen months, and in reviewing my work to-day I have to express my devout thankfulness to Almighty God for the success that has attended my efforts in spreading the truth as it is in Jesus. I entered Benalla! unknown and unlooked for, but within twenty-four hours after my arrival had formed a class numbering five or six. During the first week I scoured the greater part of the district, everywhere meeting with encouragement. At the end of five days' travel I was perfectly satisfied there was an important field of labour before me, and that, by the help of God, I should be able to make it a prosperous one. The result, so far, has come up to my most sanguine expectations. The plan I adopt is as follows :- I visit from house to house, when in Benalla from two to six p.m.; when out in the country from nine a.m. to one p.m. Wherever I can get two or three members together I form them into a class, appointing one for a leader; thus every man is to his work. Where

a class cannot be formed I visit the members separately, and give them their quarterly tickets, giving what advice I consider necessary. If anything should prevent me visiting such members in time for their tickets, I send them by post, with a few words of encouragement.

Where service cannot be held on the Sabbath I give a weeknight service; thus, while some of our people have not all they wish, they are kept from spiritual starvation.

In Benalla proper I have held, ever since my entrance upon the work, cottage prayer-meetings. These have been a means of great blessing. I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life in them. Sometimes we have been so crowded out at these meetings that I could scarcely obtain standing room to conduct the meeting. My heart swells with gratitude to God as I remember how many have been brought to God through these meetings.

My circuit, though the youngest, is now the largest, and, I believe, the most prosperous, in the Ovens and Murray district. To God be all the praise! My circuit extends 35 miles in one direction, 25 another, 30 another, 14 another, and 10 in another. I travel from 600 to 700 miles a quarter, and preach about 45 times.

We have nine preaching-places, at which services are held nearly every Sabbath. I don't reckon places where services are only held during the week. 'We have now eight classes formed in different parts of the circuit. I have 14 local preachers and exhorters helping me in the good work, and we return this quarter 83 full members, and seven on trial. Our last quarter's returns (£59 6s.) place us independent of any subsidy from the Home Mission Committee. We have raised for all purposes during fourteen months £500. In my first report to the Home Mission Committee I stated that at the end of the first year we should be able to support ourselves, and the Lord has enabled me to see this fully borne out. We hope in future to be able to give help to other Home Mission stations which are not so highly favoured.

Our Benalla church will be finished shortly. It is one of the finest buildings this side of Melbourne, and when finished will cost us about £800. We have another building nearly finished at Violet

Town, and we are taking steps this week to erect one at Euroa.

I have the same machinery at work here we have in all our circuits, and everything (connexional funds excepted) is conducted upon the same principle. I enclose you one of our last quarter's plans, and from it you will have an idea. of the extent of our work. My time is gone, and I must close. Other work demands my attention at once. The Lord be with your spirit—With kindest regards to M ... King and Mrs. Spencer,

Yours truly in Christ John DONNES.

Annual Report 2023

Grace and peace to you all in the name of Jesus Christ, Word, and Wisdom of God. The members of UCNHS live, work and play on lands and waters that have never been ceded and where First Nations people encountered Christ through law and ceremony in ancient times. We pay our respect to the custodians of those lands, and to their elders past and present. We celebrate the passing through Parliament of a question to be put to the Australian people that will amend the Constitution to recognise the First Nations people and establish a First Nations Voice to Parliament. The UCNHS supports a Yes vote on the Voice and urges its members to vote in the affirmative for this historic change, an important and necessary step in the journey toward reconciliation and justice.

I am grateful to current members of the UCNHS Board—Ken Barelli (Vic), Richard La'Brooy (NSW), Alison Longworth (WA), Lauren Merritt (NT), Steve Orme (NT), Damian Palmer (NSW), Judith Raftery (Secretary, SA), and Robert Renton (Acting Treasurer, Vic), each of which has faithfully volunteered their time to ensure the smooth operations of the Society. Ken and Damian are the most recent additions to the Board. The late Bob Coote, who recently passed away, served as Treasurer in an interim capacity and I would like to express the Society's gratitude to Bob for his contribution to the UCNHS as well as our sympathy to his family and friends. Robert Renton has taken on the responsibility of the Treasury until a more permanent person can be found. Julia Pitman represented Queensland on the Board until stepping away due to the pressures of congregational ministry. Clive Jackson from the

The Evangelical History Association: Robert D Linder Evangelical History Prize

The Evangelical History Association is pleased to announce the establishment of the Robert D Linder Evangelical History Prize.

The Robert D Linder Evangelical History Prize is to serve as a memorial to the contribution of Robert D Linder to the study of Australian evangelical history.

The Prize is intended to foster and recognise research and scholarship in the field of the history of evangelicalism.

The Prize will be awarded each year to the best essay on a subject connected with the history of evangelicalism.

The winning author will receive AUD\$500. The winning entry will be published in Lucas: An Evangelical History Review. Other essays entered into the competition will be considered for publication in Lucas.

Essay requirements:

- Essays on any aspect of the history of evangelicalism will be considered.
- Essays must be based on original research or offer a fresh interpretation of well-known evidence.
- Essays must be between 4000 and 8000 words in length.
- Essays must use the 'General Style Guide for Lucas Contributions' published at the end of each number of Lucas or at <https://www.evangelicalhistory.org/journal.html>
- Essays already published, or accepted for publication, or under consideration for publication, are not eligible.

Essays should be submitted by email as a Word attachment to the Secretary of the Evangelical History Association at secretaryeha@gmail.com by 31 January 2024. The winner will be announced at the Annual General Meeting of the Association in March-April 2024.

MYTHIC READING

Two great hurdles block our path, when we try to understand the Christmas stories in Luke and Matthew. Our culture and our ways of thinking have constructed these big hurdles across our path. They can effectively block our path to understanding and stop us ever gaining the prize of wisdom.

The first hurdle is the easier to name, and maybe get beyond. Its name is over-familiarity. As we all know familiarity breeds contempt. We become inoculated by years of over-exposure. A way to deal with this is to try, as far as possible, to block out our preconceptions, to try to read the story as if it was for the first time, in a book we've never read before. This may even open up a way to approach the next obstacle, as this way of reading can help us realise these stories seem to be in the realm of fantasy, fiction or a fairy story. Technically they are myths and rationality in our minds is the barrier.

However, in our culture a prominent idea associated with myth is a lie. Yet in the world of literature a myth is a way of presenting truths about usually deep aspects of human experience. Myths are stories that are hard to forget, hard to understand, and sometimes deeply disturbing.

Some stories in the Bible are myths. Just like some of Shakespeare's plays—one example is "Macbeth" seemingly about an ancient king and queen in Scotland. It is really mythically about the realities of life in Elizabethan England, and presumably about our contemporary human experience, if it still speaks to us. Issues of what Shakespeare got right or wrong historically are not only irrelevant but utterly misleading in terms of finding meaning.

When we read the birth stories of Jesus we have to ask, "What do these mythic stories tell us about the role of Jesus in our lives and times?" "What do these stories seek to disclose about our human condition?"

Read in mythic ways they can disclose what is wonderful and disturbing, and even life-giving.

Thoughts by Ian Higgins—to complement the poem on page 7

Vic/Tas Historical Society has recently been recruited as an Acting Membership Recruitment Officer until that office can be filled on a more permanent basis and we are grateful for his assistance. I would like to record my thanks to the President of the Assembly, the Rev. Sharon Hollis, for her patronage of the Society and for the enthusiasm she has shown and encouragement she has given to our work.

The Society's objectives are to

- promote and advance the study of the history of the Uniting Church and its predecessor churches;
- encourage and facilitate research into and publication (by any means) of the history of the Uniting Church and its predecessor churches;
- organise conferences, public lectures and workshops;
- establish connections with other national and international historical organisations;
- award prizes and scholarships which advance public knowledge of the Uniting Church history, including the Geoff Barnes Memorial Prize for excellence in Church History;
- draw to the attention of the Assembly significant dates, events, and people in the history of the Church and its predecessor churches with the aspiration that appropriate resources may be provided for their celebration, commemoration, or reflection on the contemporary life of the Church; and
- do all things necessary, including fund raising, to enable the Organisation to meet its objectives.

This report will record success in most of the objectives. Since its establishment in 2017, the UCNHS has focused its work on the relevance of historical study to the present witness and mission of the Church, as well as matters of wide public interest, such as the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Church's response, through Uniting Redress, to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to the Abuse of Children. In July 2022, the UCNHS drew 163 registrations for a webinar on *History, Truth Telling and the Uluru Statement from the Heart*, the recording of which has so far attracted over 1,800 views on YouTube <https://youtu.be/L4emSpCyEE>. In association with the

University of Divinity and its School of Indigenous Studies, the Society brought together an expert panel to engage in respectful and robust discussion around the Statement and explored the place of history and truth telling in working toward a more just and self-determined future for First Nations people. The theme of the webinar was an appropriate extension of the Uniting Church 16th Assembly renewing, in May 2022, of the Covenant between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. A free copy of a booklet containing the talks is available as downloaded on Trove as well as on our Assembly webpage. This resource has been used by individuals and church groups as a resource for the upcoming referendum on the proposed constitutional amendment.

Our Fourth Biennial UCNHS conference was held on Larrakia country (in Darwin), from 24–27 August 2023 at Darwin Memorial Church as well as commemorating the Centenary of the establishment of the Milingimbi Methodist Mission. The conference was hosted by the Northern Synod, Darwin Memorial Church and Nungalinga College where we were wonderfully hosted on the Saturday. We were also very warmly welcomed to the Chung Wah Chinese temple and cultural centre. The conference was supported by a very generous financial gift of \$20,000 from the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation which enabled us to fly in some delegates from the Milingimbi Mob in the Crocodile Islands and helped with other expenses. I am very grateful to Steve and Judy Orme and other members of the Planning Committee, Gwen Warmbirrir, Gwenda Baker, Lauren Merritt, and Wendy Beresford-Manning for the excellent work in planning what I consider to be our best conference so far.

Originally managed by the now defunct Historical Reference Committee of the Assembly, the Geoff Barnes Memorial Fund (originally the Congregational History Fund) has now become the responsibility of the UCNHS. The fund was established to offer a monetary prize for the best church history essay by a first-year student at United Theological College (UTC Sydney). The terms of this have been now broadened to a more national basis under the auspices of the UCNHS, and in dialogue with UTC. The Rev. Dr Geoffrey

Barnes (1926–2005) was born and educated in Melbourne and ordained a Congregational minister in 1951. In 1967 he moved to Sydney to serve as Principal of Camden Theological College and later as Lecturer in Church History at UTC from 1975 to 1993. He was Moderator of the NSW Synod for 1987–1988. He earned a masters degree in theology from Hartford Seminary Foundation USA, and a doctorate in history from Macquarie University NSW. This Prize was renamed in recognition of Geoff's significant contribution to the study and teaching of church history.

The UCNHS is now seeking to promote the fund in two ways. First, nominations have been invited for the best essay in history undertaken by an undergraduate student in any Uniting Church theological college. While essays about the Uniting Church or its precedent bodies are welcome, 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 and received a grade of 75% or higher. Nominations are to come from any member of academic staff, with the consent of the student, and should be received by the end of each calendar year for evaluation and awarding in February of the following year. The essays will be evaluated by a judging panel of the UCNHS. The amount of the prize is currently \$250, 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 the judging panel, is received. Second, we topped up the existing Fund from our own resources to \$10,000 and invited contributions of any amount to the Fund to ensure that the fund grows into the future and to increase the size of the prize. We recently received a very generous donation to the prize from acting membership officer, Clive Jackson, for which we are very grateful.

The Society has accepted a proposal from the Rev. Dr Dean Eland to develop a UCA Biographical Index. The aim of the project is to provide an online accessible data collection of information about those in UCA leadership over its first fifty years. The first phase will include those who were involved as officers and leaders of the Assembly, Synods, Presbyteries and Congress and who are now deceased. A second

proposed phase is to include those who contributed insights and support for union prior to 1977. Each entry will include references and resources accompanying a 700 word summary along the lines of *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*. A working group reporting to UCNHS Board has been formed which includes Dean Eland (convener), Alison Longworth, Damian Palmer, Robert Renton and Glen O'Brien.

Membership of the Society stands at 107, which is an increase of 17 since the 2022 AGM. Clive Jackson's Membership Report provided a helpful state by state breakdown which shows that we are strongest in NSW/ACT and Vic/Tas synods and have some work to do in other parts of the country. Synods without their own history societies have been invited to add a link to the UCNHS webpage on their websites and most have done so. It is hoped that this will further extend our reach and draw in new members.

Our regular newsletter *Church History and Heritage*, edited by Robert Renton, is published four times a year in March, June, September and December, and is circulated to all members and posted on our webpage as a free download. Edited Conference Proceedings volumes with papers from each of the biennial society conferences are also available in PDF from the website. This practice will continue with publications arising from each conference. We are grateful to staff of the Assembly Communications team, Bethany Broadstock and Bec Beisler, for their help in updating and revising the UCNHS page on the Assembly's webpage. They have also run a short article in *National Update* highlighting our activities. We had a problem with Google searches for some time, where a search for our name would lead to a 'zombie' site attached to the previous Assembly webpage which had been decommissioned and contained long outdated information. One practical result of this was a loss of income as people were renewing their membership at an earlier, lower rate. A recent search resulted in landing on the current page, so hopefully that has now been resolved. We have found social media a good means of keeping interested people updated on our activities, with 651 Facebook followers (150 new followers since the conference) and 70 followers on X (Twitter). The increase in Facebook followers was probably assisted by the live posts that were shared across

both platforms during the conference proceedings which resulted in a good level of engagement.

The UCNHS remains committed to historical work, not merely out of antiquarian interest, but because it understands that the Church's present mission both flows out of history and makes history. It seeks to empower and equip the people of today's Uniting Church to engage meaningfully in historical study, and to recognise the power of memory, as well as both the pitfalls and value of commemoration. There are a number of high priorities for the 2023 AGM including the election of new Board members of the Society. A number of Board members reached the extent of their terms under the constitution, and the Assembly Standing Committee (to whom I reported on 22 June 2023) have allowed an extension to the terms of Alison Longworth, Judith Raftery and Robert Renton, should the members agree to re-elect them. I very much welcome the nomination of Dr Patricia Curthoys, who has served on the Board previously, and would bring a wealth of experience to the Society's leadership. The Board will choose its own Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, and I have every confidence that it will move confidently into the future, building on what has already been achieved. I would like to say a special word of thanks to Dr Judith Raftery for her fine work as Secretary of the Society since its inception in 2017. This will be my last report as Chair of the UCNHS, after two terms (four years) in the role. It has been a privilege to have served the UCA in this way and my prayers will be with my successor, with Board members, and with the entire membership as the Society moves forward.

Glen O'Brien



Minutes of the AGM 2023

These Minutes are unconfirmed at this time of publication. The meeting was held 13 September 2023, 4.00pm Eastern Standard Time, via Zoom

1. Opening and welcome: Board Chair, Rev. Professor Glen O'Brien opened the meeting with an acknowledgement of country, reaffirmation of our commitment to reconciliation, and prayer.

2. Formal Greeting: President of the UCA National Assembly and Patron of the UCNHS, Rev. Sharon Hollis, commended the UCNHS on the recent conference, and on its ongoing work in encouraging the UCA to face who we are and to engage in truth-telling. She said that through its commitment to exploring its history in such a way as to illuminate the present and the future, it enriches the life of the whole church. She also reiterated the Assembly Standing Committee's appreciation of Glen O'Brien's fine contribution as Chair of the UCNHS Board for the last four years.

3. Attendance:

Present: Peter Aumann, Ken Barelli, Barry Brown, Ron Coster, Patricia Curthoys, Scott Davis, Dean Eland, Sharon Hollis, Clive Jackson, Richard La'Brooy, John Lamont, Alison Longworth, Robin Longworth, Glen O'Brien, Steve Orme, Geoff Paterson, Judith Raftery, Margaret Reeson, Robert Renton, Keith Suter, Peter Swain, William Emilsen (22)

Apologies: Leanne Davis, Christine Gordon, Robert Gribben, Lauren Merritt, Judy Orme (5)

4. Confirmation of Minutes: Minutes of last AGM, held 21 July 2022, and circulated to members, were confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Reports:

5.i. Chair's report: Glen O'Brien (Chair). Glen's report (attached) was tabled and taken as read.

5.ii. Financial Report:

Robert Renton (Interim Treasurer). Robert's report (attached) was tabled. It was noted that conference expenses are yet to be included in the balance sheet. The meeting reiterated its appreciation of the generous contribution (\$20,000) of the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, which enabled us to fly in delegates to the conference from Milingimbi, and cover other expenses.

Robert moved and Patricia Curthoys seconded a motion of appreciation of the late Bob Coote's work as Treasurer, and the meeting agreed that a memo be sent to his widow, Anne, noting that he had been remembered at this AGM. Action: Judith

5.iii. Membership Report: Clive Jackson (Acting Membership Officer). Clive's report (attached) was tabled. Judith Raftery asked whether the published membership numbers reflected some inadvertent lapses in keeping payment of subscriptions up to date and suggested that the society needs a better procedure for communicating with members about when subscriptions are due. Action: Robert, Clive

6. Elections:

6.i. Glen O'Brien and Judith Raftery summarised the existing situation:

Current Board members, whose terms have expired, but who are willing to stand for re-election: Alison Longworth, Judith Raftery, Robert Renton. Note: Extension of their terms had been approved by Assembly Standing Committee.

Current Board members, whose terms are not completed and who are willing to continue to serve: Ken Barelli, Richard La'Brooy, Steve Orme, Damian Palmer, plus a recently co-opted member, Clive Jackson, whose co-option by the Board needed formal endorsement by the AGM.

Current Board member, Glen O'Brien, who has completed three two-year terms, and co-opted

A REMINDER... 2023 SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE — \$25:
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or by sending a cheque to 28 Bindaree Court, Mernda, Vic. 3754
(INCLUDE YOUR NAME PLEASE)

member, Lauren Merritt, who has completed a two-year term, are not seeking re-election.

An additional nomination had been received from Patricia Curthoys. No other nominations were forthcoming.

Thus, there were eight candidates for election as 'ordinary members' (Longworth, Raftery, Renton, Barelli, La'Brooy, Orme, Palmer and Curthoys), and one as a co-opted member (Jackson).

6.ii. The names of the above candidates were proposed for election *en bloc* and were all duly elected by the AGM by a show of hands.

6.iii. Nominations for office holders, were received, from among these elected members, and endorsed by the AGM by a show of hands: Chair: Judith Raftery; Secretary: Patricia Curthoys; Treasurer: Robert Renton.

7. UCNHS National Conferences:

7.i. Feedback on 2023 conference was overwhelmingly positive and included the following points.

The theme, setting, catering, link with Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, involvement of Nungalinga College and of several indigenous speakers, the hosting by the Northern Synod and the involvement of the Moderator all added "something special" and made the conference a very coherent event.

The online delivery worked well, except in the case of the opening address which, due to circumstances outside the conference organisers' control, could not be presented live. It was easy for online participants who wanted to ask questions to do so. It had proved to be well worthwhile paying for professional support to ensure the technology worked well.

There was a suggestion that perhaps space might be found in future conference programs for some interactive/group responses to conference papers.

The convenor of the planning committee, Steve Orme, acknowledged the contribution of all its members (Gwenda Baker, Wendy Beresford-Maning, Lauren Merritt, Steve Orme, Judy Orme, Gwen Warmbirrri) to the success of the conference and the meeting agreed that an official message of appreciation be sent to them. Action: Judith Raftery

7.ii. 2025 conference: where and when?

Judith Raftery presented a proposal from Margaret Reeson that the 2025 conference be held in Canberra.

Margaret argued that Canberra had good potential meeting options with suitable facilities, accommodation options, and national institutions of interest to historians, including the Frontier Services archive at the National Library.

While there is no obvious/ready made organising group in Canberra, Margaret had already received positive responses to the idea and openness to being part of the planning from Damian Palmer (UTC and one of our Board members) and Andrew Smith (an ACT Presbytery minister) who suggested that if the UCNHS supports the idea of having the conference in Canberra, it send a proposal to that effect to ACT Presbytery Standing Committee and ask for their support in forming a working party to plan it.

The AGM supported Margaret's proposal and made the following points:

While the UCNHS would probably want to co-locate its 2027 conference with the 2027 Assembly (50th anniversary of UCA), this Assembly is unlikely to be in Canberra and thus would not compromise the choice of Canberra for our 2025 conference.

Canberra City Uniting Church, on Northbourne Ave seems like a suitable location.

The UCNHS Board could be asked to take a more active role in planning than is usually the case.

The AGM resolved that we send an official proposal to the next meeting of the ACT Presbytery Standing Committee (21 September) re holding our 2025 conference in Canberra. Action: Judith

8. News from states and territories:

SA: UCSAHS President Dean Eland reported that the new Synod Moderator and General Secretary will visit the History Centre soon, and that one of his priorities is to encourage congregations to tell their stories and to use the Historical Society and the History Centre as resources for doing this.

WA: Alison Longworth reported that she is planning to approach the new Moderator, Ian

Tozer, about furthering support for UCA history in WA.

NSW: William Emilsen reported that he and others are working on the publication of a collection of historical essays to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of UTC in 2025. The essays would focus on aspects of college life and he sees this as part of a push to encourage the writing of histories of church institutions.

Vic/Tas: Robert Renton reported that they are trying to keep connections with Tasmania alive and to encourage the depositing of records with Illuminate. He mentioned the upcoming tour of churches in Geelong, being organised by Geoff Paterson, and commended Geoff's contribution to "genuine networking" among the churches. Clive Jackson reported that the Vic. society had had "a terrific year" and cited Brian Howe's three talks about his life and D'Arcy Wood's session on hymn heritage as standouts in their public program.

9. Members' feedback and ideas for the future

John Lamont asked about UCSAHS's use of Illuminate and Dean Eland explained that they use it to only a limited degree, because of an arrangement with Genealogy SA that provides digitisation at no cost.

Dean Eland reported on the establishment of a project - with national support - to develop a UCA biographical index. This would build upon work he did for a paper presented at the 2021 conference about members of the first National Assembly of the UCA (June 1977). The group is currently working on clarifying the scope of the project, time frames, selection of subjects, modes of publication etc.

Dean also invited any visitors to SA to visit the UCSAHS History Centre to get an idea of our activities and the scope of our historical and archival collections.

William Emilsen suggested that it is difficult for ordinary members to be meaningfully connected to the UCNHS, and thought that more webinars or other public events might be a way to deal with this.

• Margaret Reeson has undertaken to help friends and colleagues in the highlands of PNG discover more about their own church history and is keen to develop narratives to augment the

photographic resources already deposited with Illuminate.

Clive Jackson wondered if Glen O'Brien would find it useful to have an official designation of Immediate Past President. Glen felt there was no need for this, unless the society felt it was useful to it, but offered his ongoing involvement, especially in his role as our social media link.

CLOSE: The meeting closed at 5.30pm EST.

GORDON GEORGE POWELL, AM, MA, BD, LLD, KCSJ

22/1/1911 TO 1/2/2005

[The Rev. Dr John Bodycomb, whose career in sociology, academia, church growth and pastoral care over half a century and his provocative challenges to the church at large inspired many. He died in January 2019. In 2005 he wrote the following obituary for Gordon Powell which was published that year in the *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*.](#)

In the 1930s members of Peterhead Presbyterian Church (SA) and pupils in the local school all knew Miss Hoffmeister. Every Saturday morning she swept and dusted the Peterhead church as a labour of love. One day she said to her young minister, "You know, Mr Powell, people are much more interesting than theories or doctrines. Preach about people." Gordon Powell says that advice challenged profoundly and changed his approach to preaching.

From 1946–51 Gordon was lent by the Presbyterians to Collins Street Independent (today St Michael's). I sat regularly in the gallery, like twelve hundred others in the place craning forward as he picked up yet another problem or question or need, unpacked it and showed us how to deal with it. He did not bother too much with expounding matters of doctrine. That was more implicit than explicit. It always was with Gordon; he was a story-teller theologian.

But he did it with such passion. Gordon was not a big man, but there was a magic in that voice,

which was like no other preacher voice. A little deeper than mid-range, with a compelling resonance and sometimes a hint of the fervour and emotion that made one think of the Welsh *hwyl* (pronounced who-ill) – a kind of ring in the voice that builds up a tension in the air. Gordon always sounded like a man who was in no doubt as to the truth of the message he brought us.

Five years ago, when I began transcribing his memoirs, I commented that his style in the pulpit, without any hint of bluff or bombast but at the same time superbly assured, suggested a man who had never suffered from stage fright. I asked if he had always been so poised when called on to speak. The response was rather a surprise. He told me that as a child he was painfully shy and seldom spoke until he was about three. When, close to his 16th birthday, Gordon told his mother he thought of being a minister, she laughed and said, "You would never make a minister!" Later she would become his greatest supporter, and Gordon rated her the single most powerful influence in his personal formation. His father, a fine Presbyterian layman, died at 56; Gordon was then 23 and the sadness was still there seventy years later.

Gordon Powell was the firstborn of George and Louisa (née Clarke); later they added Sid and Enid. George Powell was a Warnambool dentist, but duly moved to Melbourne. Gordon was educated at Malvern Grammar and Scotch College; then at the University of Melbourne and Ormond College. While still at school he met the bubbly Gwen Gilchrist, a year his junior. Thus began a nine-year courtship that tested them both – and issued in a marriage that would be similarly tested. Toward the end of his theological education Gordon accepted a scholarship at the University of Glasgow that took him away from Gwen for a year. He majored in biblical languages, hoping to teach New Testament. Later he served as a chaplain in the RAAF, leaving Gwen with a young family. Very aptly, he dedicated his first book, "Two Steps to Tokyo", to 'the lady who waited'.

The year in Scotland was densely packed, but nothing approached his placement at Govan with the Rev. George MacLeod. As a captain in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders during World War I, MacLeod was highly decorated. But he was to become an ardent pacifist, a crusader for social justice and founder of the Iona Community. "The

most formative months of my life" was Gordon's assessment of this period. He rated George MacLeod one of the four men most influential on him. (The others were Harry Emerson Fosdick, Leslie Weatherhead and Billy Graham)

On return in 1937 Gordon became assistant at Toorak to Dr John Mackenzie, Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church. He and Gwen were married at Toorak that year. Meanwhile the New Testament chair at Ormond College had become vacant. Gordon saw this as the post for which he had been preparing, but was not offered it. "The Assembly in its wisdom chose the Reverend Alexander Yule, who was a real scholar. I was disappointed at the time, but as I look back now I am grateful to God for keeping me in the preaching and pastoral ministry and leading me to three of the most exciting pulpits in Australia."

But this was not immediate. In 1938 Gordon went to Port Adelaide. He was twenty-seven and Gwen twenty-six, and she was five months pregnant. Newly-weds with a baby can do little wrong, especially when there had not been a newborn in the manse for fifty years, and they had a stellar three years there. Gordon was ordained on May 24, 1938—140 years to the day after John Wesley "felt his heart strangely warmed" in Aldersgate Street! Baby Rosemary arrived in June and son David in May 1941. Meanwhile, unemployment and related problems were widespread in Port Adelaide. Gordon recalled an elder's wife asking Gwen how they were managing with furnishing the manse. They had brought some furniture but on a stipend of £6 a week were making slow progress. Gwen said, "All right, but we haven't any carpets yet." The elder's wife said, "We've been married nineteen years and we still haven't any carpets!" Still fresh from Glasgow and George MacLeod, Gordon confronted the CEO of Holden's plant over the company's employment policy, and convinced him to engage another 500 rather than give overtime to the existing work force.

In 1941 he took up an invitation to Scots Church, Melbourne, as assistant to the Rev. Golder Burns. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (December 7th) brought the US into World War II, and brought the hostilities closer to home. Toward the end of 1942 the senior Presbyterian forces chaplain told Burns that he needed more chaplains, and wondered if Scots would release Gordon "if he felt

called to volunteer." Gordon was in turmoil. He felt embarrassed because he was not in uniform. But he and Gwen now had three youngsters, with daughter Mardi born that October. Gwen had lost an uncle in WWI and had a brother with an air crew in England, but did not stand in his way. At thirty-one he became a RAAF chaplain in the Pacific region, variously in New Guinea, the Trobriand Islands and the Admiralty Islands.

Nearing discharge, he was asked to call on Peter Tait, publisher and Congregational layman; no explanation was offered. Tait looked at him and exclaimed, "I didn't know you were so young!" He asked Gordon if he would consider going to Collins Street Independent (today St Michael's) for a year. Gordon assumed he was being offered an assistantship with the Welshman, Penry Evans, and turned him down. Tait said, "You don't understand. I am asking you to take Mr Evans' place. We are not asking you to give up your status as a Presbyterian. You would come as 'guest minister'."

Before this conversation Gordon had been invited by Rotary International to speak at "Institutes of International Understanding" in the US. Over four months he lectured in forty-eight centres. In a Pennsylvania town he had a surprise phone call from the director of the program. "I've arranged an interview for you with Harry Emerson Fosdick: three o'clock Thursday afternoon." Gordon replied "Thank you very much. I can't do it; I'm 300 miles away." After a gasp, his caller said, "Gordon, there are people in this country who would give their right arm for an interview with Fosdick. You get yourself to New York City!"

Gordon asked Fosdick the secret of success in preaching. He replied, "The average preacher seems to think people come to church worried sick about what happened to the Hittites three thousand years ago. They couldn't care less. They are worried about what is going to happen to them in New York next week. They are worried about the atom bomb. Preach to their needs." (This was eight months after the first nuclear devices had been exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki) Gordon also made connections with Norman Vincent Peale of Marble Collegiate Church, who introduced the world to 'the power of positive thinking', and with Clarence Macartney of First Presbyterian Church,

Pittsburgh, who had written "Preaching Without Notes".

Daughter Jenny arrived in September 1945, and on his return from the US, Gordon began (ostensibly) a twelve-month appointment—that expanded to six years. Much about Collins Street Independent was little different from a Presbyterian appointment—but for the following. After three years Gordon was feeling the pressure and asked for an assistant. The deacons (today read 'elders') agreed that a young woman ordained in 1937, the Reverend Isabelle Merry, was the one to invite. But the church meeting, which had a preponderance of women in attendance, vetoed the proposal. They wanted a man. Perhaps more accurately, they did not want a woman! This came as a shock to Gordon. The first woman to be ordained in Australia by any denomination had been the Congregationalist Winifred Kiek. Bel Merry was the second. She was as good a preacher and pastor as any man, and better than many. Gordon was deeply hurt by this experience, and worried for years about the effect on Bel Merry.

When asked about the highlights of his ministry with Collins Street, there was not a moment's hesitation. Gordon saw his most notable contribution to the common good as founding and fostering Alcoholics Anonymous in Victoria, with the help of US entertainer Lillian Roth—whose life story "I'll Cry Tomorrow" became a movie. His backstage appearance at the Tivoli Theatre, dapper as always and replete with clerical collar among scantily clad chorus girls, made news.

Equally significant for many was the visit in 1951 of Leslie Weatherhead. Wesley's Irving Benson had for years been trying to get Weatherhead, and was trumped by Gordon. Collins Street and Wesley agreed to collaborate in planning the visit. Weatherhead asked Gordon to check the page proofs of his magnum opus. This assignment, and hearing Weatherhead's addresses, expanded Gordon's developing interest in 'psychology, religion and healing' – the title of Weatherhead's book. His own *Personal Peace and Power* had been published in 1950. It did so well that a new

edition was soon needed. Weatherhead wrote a foreword, saying of Gordon,

"I formed a very high opinion of his gifts both as a writer and as a preacher. His dynamic and attractive personality gets through to the printed page, and he combines a psychological insight into the problems of ordinary men and women with a confident belief that they can be helped to find a solution in the Christian religion and in the power released through faith and prayer."

This description aptly described the man whose impact on Melbourne led now to an invitation from St Stephen's in Macquarie Street (Sydney). He was ready for the biggest challenge of his ministry. Forty-one years old, he had worked with large congregations, was widely travelled, had been a war-time chaplain and was already one of the best known preachers in Australia. Six months after his induction, Gordon ran into five young adults in the church porch. All belonged to suburban congregations, sang in choirs or taught Sunday school and felt they should be in their own churches on Sundays. But they wanted to worship in a big city church. Would he consider having a Wednesday lunch-hour service for them? Gordon told them he already had more than he could handle. However, such was their enthusiasm that he had to respond. He told them that if they could form a choir he would consult with the elders.

They made a start on September 3rd, 1952. Newspapers gave them good support, and 450 showed up. The following week there were 900. It soon became the largest regular lunch-hour service in the world. When Vernon Turner, who was to found the Christian Broadcasting Association, located a Brisbane station interested in broadcasting the services, it was not long before twenty more in five states were broadcasting to an estimated quarter million – every week.

I asked Gordon how he accounted for the influential ministry he developed at St Stephen's. He was reluctant to claim much credit, and preferred to see it as coming from the cumulative effect of assorted factors. In his view there was no simple, single cause explanation. He said that St Stephen's people had a 'gift' for making visitors feel welcome. He cited sympathetic newspapers and radio stations, and

noted that the 50s and 60s were a good time for publishing religious books. During this period he had released no less than nine—most of which were based on series of addresses.

In 1959 Billy Graham drew 719,000 to his Sydney meetings, and there were over 26,000 inquirers—more than six hundred of whom were referred to St Stephen's. Gordon said, "I disagreed with some of Billy's theology, but decided that was not a good enough reason to withhold support. It seemed to me that he could not do what he did if God were not with him—and if God was with him, I wasn't going to be against him." Gordon and Billy Graham became close friends, well able to manage their differences over golf!

By the early 1960s Gordon was becoming something of a crusader. Media reports indicate that he sometimes took an unpopular line. In 1962 he advocated admitting Hong Kong Chinese as migrants. In 1961 he had been outspoken on what he saw as the scorn for religion and traditional values expressed by some university faculty. He said of them, "This pocket of men, all despising Christianity, is doing its best to create a generation without faith." And in 1960 he had criticised lifting the ban on "Lady Chatterly's Lover". He didn't mind being regarded as "a bit of a wowser".

His toughest period came in 1962. The NSW government had appointed a royal commission to consider the legalisation of off-course betting. Gordon had grown up in a family and a church fiercely opposed to gambling. When he went to South Australia, he was sickened by the betting shops. In depressed Port Adelaide he saw many losers and few winners. He offered to appear before the royal commission, as did a number of other church leaders. He believed the presiding judge regarded gambling as harmless just so long as the punter did not lay out more than he could afford. He was assisted by a QC who asked Gordon if he knew of any cases of illegal gambling. Gordon had confidential information and answered 'yes'. The QC demanded that he reveal details; when Gordon refused he was accused of fabrication. The judge was particularly critical, and newspapers carried headlines like 'judge rebukes cleric', cleric must tell police', 'minister fails details on SP charge'.

Gordon was already registering fatigue from a heavy work load, and the distress this caused him and the family pushed him closer the limit of his resources. John Sutherland Bonnell, then visiting St Stephen's as the guest 'world famous preacher', helped him. Meanwhile Weatherhead had been told that Gordon was having a major breakdown. Although this was an overstatement, Weatherhead wrote him a number of letters in which he referred to 'the third age of menace'—encountered by men in their fifties. Gordon said, "In 1964 I was 53, and passing through a bad time. I would wake at about 4 a.m., my mind bursting with all the problems of the day, and when day broke I wouldn't feel fit for work." A psychiatrist diagnosed 'endogenous depression' (i.e. depression for which there is no obvious precipitating cause), and treated it successfully with imipramine

This episode was shared in the context of discussion about other notables (Fosdick, Weatherhead and Peale) who had all 'crashed' at some point—perhaps an occupational hazard for the passionately committed individual. But despite the turbulence of those early 60s and the bad spell in '64, Gordon had no reason or wish to move. Yet, when asked if he would be open to an invitation, he could think of no reason to say no. In 1965 Scots Church in Melbourne was vacant, and issued him an invitation. Gordon moved to Melbourne, the lunch-hour services came with him and he set himself to lead Scots into the Uniting Church. His colleague would be Ray ('Bish') Russell, recently retired head Presbyterian chaplain in the RAAF.

Billy Graham was back in 1969, and Gordon was elected chair of the Melbourne Committee. When a team member had to withdraw, Gordon stepped in to address a series of rallies in large theatres. He and Gwen received no gratuities then or previously from the Graham organisation, but were given a trip to the Holy Land. In 1972 he went to Dallas (Texas) to take part in another Graham crusade. He was also guest preacher in the national Presbyterian Church (Washington DC) and at Garden Grove Community Church – precursor of the Crystal Cathedral.

Shortly after boarding the flight out of Melbourne, Gordon opened a sealed envelope containing the result from Scots' voting on union. The congregation had recorded a small majority for it,

well short of the two-thirds needed. "It was a terrible blow," he said. "I literally wept." As a passionate advocate of union, Gordon felt out of place with a congregation not going in that direction. The age at which he could take retirement was looming, but that held no attractions. Nor did going to another Presbyterian church if it meant a repetition of the Scots experience.

He was surprised by a letter from Lowell Thomas, distinguished media man in the US. Thomas had been the voice of Fox Movietone news for 17 years and had read the CBS news for 46 years! But it was as a member of Christ Church Quaker Hill, in Pauling (NY state) that Thomas was writing; he was issuing an invitation. Thus began six and a half years that Gordon described as "the most enjoyable time in my whole ministry." Most of his congregation worked in Manhattan and came to their 'cottages' on week-ends. Gordon had time to improve his golf, to sift through invitations from around the country, and work on his book "Famous Birthdays".

In 1981, and after forty-three years of active ministry, he retired—aged seventy. He was eager to continue speaking and writing. In 1983 cancer was confirmed and major surgery was followed by a lengthy convalescence. In 1992 daughter Rosemary died of cancer. Duly Gordon was to have a triple by-pass, to lose his hearing and sight, and in 2004 to have a cerebral haemorrhage that interfered with speech and movement. Not to be outdone, he had physiotherapy and speech therapy, but all these difficulties were taking their toll. "I think God lets some of us live too long," he said.

But in the spirit of Philippians 4, a favourite passage, Gordon chose to dwell on better things. One of his great joys was the change that had taken place in the relationship between Catholics and Protestants. As early as 1952 he had been enjoying the company of Catholic priests, and in 1974 he invited Archbishop Frank Little to preach in Scots Church. In the recycling of good memories, he would also reflect on weddings. "Marrying people," he said, "remains one of the most delightful experiences of ministry. One can get very close to the couples he marries."

With three years in the RAAF, Gordon wasn't naïve about human nature. Yet some who knew him closely saw a kind of 'innocence' that ensured he

always saw the best, in even the most unpromising specimens. Following the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty, Gordon believed that he/she was good until proven to be a villain. In his introduction to *Famous Birthdays* he said, "Christianity is founded on the conviction there is a diamond in every soul no matter how rough the exterior." David Powell recalls his father being prey to car salesmen! This desire to believe the best of others took him into dangerous places. When controversial US evangelist Oral Roberts fled Melbourne after students pulled down his tent, Gordon scolded the culprits for violating religious freedom.

Gordon had a riotous sense of humour, and was comfortable making himself the butt of jokes. Soon after arrival in Sydney, he was invited by Alan Walker to play a round of golf at North Bondi. When they teed off for the first hole, Gordon asked where the green was; Alan Walker told him it was over the hill. Gordon wound up, struck the best drive of his life, and ball vanished. When they reached the top of the hill, they found the green—but it was followed by a cliff and the Pacific Ocean. Somewhere out in the sea was Gordon's ball. He said to Alan, "I was a stranger, and you took me in!"

But arguably his most painful experience was the decision at Scots Church not to go into union. Gordon had been active in ecumenical affairs, energetic proponent of union and confident that Scots had the numbers. He had not realised the swelling of membership came from disaffected members of suburban congregations that looked like voting for union. Moreover, he claims to have been unaware that his colleague was opposed; he had simply taken for granted that he and 'Bish' Russell were of one mind! In his nineties, Gordon was still spending many a sleepless night, re-living the experience. He seemed to be inconsolable, but felt no malice.

Among the raft of messages after he died were letters from Billy Graham and from Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral and "Hour of Power" fame. Schuller summed up Gordon this way:

"Gordon was everything, and more, that we could ever hope for in a true Christian brother. He exemplified the meaning of a true 'spiritual shepherd' . . . who responded to the high calling of devotion to God's work . . . strengthening faith,

kindling hope, and manifesting the charity of God toward His children."

[Editor's note: In 1974 Gordon Powell, along with the Rev. Allan Crawford and the Rev. Gordon McGregor, attended my ordination as a Presbyterian minister in North Essendon. Crawford, McGregor and I had all grown up in the Port Adelaide Presbyterian Church. Such was Powell's fame that when my wife and I came to Melbourne from Adelaide for our honeymoon, the one thing we didn't want to miss was Powell's Wednesday lunchtime preaching—in an age that has now well and truly passed!]

William Pascoe Cox: the Methodist spirit of contribution

by Peter Sutton



This was the First Aid Medal which was presented to Mr William Pascoe Cox. William known to all as Bing, was a very keen citizen, he was responsible for bringing the ambulance service to Numurkah. He was a volunteer driver, and served as President of the Numurkah Ambulance Auxiliary for many

years, and was honoured as a Life Member at Numurkah and of the Goulburn Valley Ambulance Service, now part of Ambulance Victoria

Bing was born the son of William Henry Cox, the Younger and was raised a Methodist. As common for Methodism William Henry Cox was teetotal and a member of the Independent Order of Rechabites. He was a Methodist and Wesleyan lay preacher for many decades. He was an enthusiastic citizen playing for the Numurkah Town Band, served as Shire Councillor, was a foundation member of the Numurkah and District Historical Society. He also co-founded the Numurkah Improvement Trust, which operated a community cinema. All profits were used to fund projects with the object of improving Numurkah. The cinema was called The Civic and exhibited films in the Numurkah Town Hall.

His community service and commitment to hard work was a reflection of his Methodist upbringing.

Bing was my grandfather.