

BARMERA CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH HISTORICAL RECORD

24 September 1919

Parkin Congregational Mission agrees to undertake work at Cobdogla and Lake Bonney (now Barmera) after request from the Co-operative Committee of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist Churches.

10 December 1919

JH Datson appointed Minister

7 January 1920

Marquee for church arrived. Later blown into Lake Bonney

18 February 1920

Tailem Bend Congregational Church building and furniture had been transported to Lake Bonney and erected for use as a church

4 March 1922

Foundation stone of this Church laid by the Rev George Rayner

9 September 1922

Church opened by Charles Walter Rutt, architect for the Church

The Rev W Penry Jones was the preacher

The Rev A G McCullough (Minister of the Church) and JH Datson took part, in the opening service

BARMERA CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Following the close of World War 1, the settlement of returned soldiers was undertaken by the Government at Cobdogla and Lake Bonney.

The attention of the Home Mission Board was directed to this district as a field of operation for our Denomination. The result was that Parkin Mission undertook to provide a man for the work and meet his salary; the Forward Movement financed the cost of the buildings; and the Ladies Auxillary collected funds for the purpose of advancing this work by providing more adequate premises.

Rev JH Datson was appointed Missioner in 1920 and left the following year. As there was no school in Barmera, Rev Datson decided to conduct one and was soon overwhelmed when more than seventy children presented themselves on the first day. Rev AG McCulloch followed Rev Datson, both of whom were Barmera soldiers.

First church services were held in a marquee which was ultimately blown into Lake Bonney on stormy day. This was replaced by an old billiard hall which was transported from Tailem Bend. This became the social, physical and spiritual centre of the town and was used by all denominations. A new church was erected in 1922 and was opened for Divine Service on 10th September 1922.

One month later Rev McCullough resigned and was replaced by Rev AM Taylor who remained as locum tenens until February 1923.

A friend in England, through the Colonial Missionary Society, donated a sum of money, extended over 5 years, for work on the River Murray. Rev Clair Palmer, exit student of Parkin College accepted the oversight of the Barmera and Cobdogla Churches and was assisted by Rev T W Fraser. At the end of January 1924, Rev Palmer resigned to accept a pastorate at Port Elliot. For 2 months Rev AM Taylor acted as temporary pastor, and on April 1st Mr AA Barbour, a former Methodist Home Missionary was appointed to the charge. During August circumstances arose which necessitated Mr Barbour's relinquishing his work and his resignation was accepted.

The district was passing through a period of depression. At Cobdogla a committee was formed, when that Church was painted and renovated and efforts made to pay off the debt and make regular payments towards the Minister's stipend.

After Mr Barber's departure, Mr BW Sanders gave several months of service with such encouraging results that early in December Rev John Beukers was asked to accept the pastorate. Accompanied by Mrs Beukers and daughter Eunice he arrived on 6th February 1925. He took up his work with enthusiasm with the result that a more hopeful spirit prevailed. The manse was improved and added to and the walls of the Church were cement coated to make them waterproof. A yard and stabling were provided for the Minister's horse, and the buggy was repaired.

Government employees were leaving the town as their work reached completion, considerably reducing the population, more particularly at Cobdogla, where for the time the services ceased. However, on July 11th 1926 services were restarted and held fortnightly in the afternoon.

By means of a lantern complete with wick and kerosene reservoir, lectures were given weekly in homes around the district, interest was sustained and a Fair held in November netted £52.18 .5. Also the mothers were received into Fellowship.

Early in 1927 the Methodist connection withdrew from the left bank of the River and Parkin Mission was asked to take over the work. A beginning was made at Kingston and later an attempt at services was made at Moorook. In October 1927 Sunday School was re-started at Cobdogla with an average attendance of 23.

On the 10th June 1928 a Kindergarten room was opened at Barmera when much of the work was done by voluntary labour, the total cost being £76. A young people's club was formed this year. The name of 16/60 Club had reference to the limitation of ages. When Mrs Beukers died in 1928 Miss Beukers was a great help to her father in his personal work.

In 1929 a car was provided for the missionary by Parkin Mission. On 7th September 1930 the first service was held in the local hall at Loveday. After over seven years of strenuous and dedicated work in the district, Rev Beukers preached his farewell service on April 10 1932.

Rev CH Bayly was his successor. Before the end of 1932 a Ladies Guild was formed at Loveday. After using the Masonic organ for ten years, the church bought its own at a cost of £12. A fete held at Loveday raised over £10 towards the cost of providing a room for the Kindergarten.

Owing to indisposition in 1934, Rev Bayly had three months leave of absence. During this time Rev LG Pleass exercised an interim ministry until the end of January 1935. During this year an approach was made for services to be held at Kingston-on-Murray. The first service was conducted in the public hall by Rev Bayly on 4th August 1935. Fortnightly evening services were held.

On January 23rd 1936, the foundation stone of the Kingston Church building was laid and it then opened Sunday April 5th.

At Barmera an extension of the church building was made to provide further accommodation for the Sunday School, and the Gloria lighting system was replaced by electricity which was then available in the town.

After six years in the district, Rev Bayly left for Mantung in June 1938, and Rev LG Pleass was welcomed to the pastorate. Evening services at Barmera were resumed, and another organ was purchased for the church. Fourteen new members joined the church in six months increasing the membership to 42. During 1940 the church was renovated inside and out by voluntary labour.

1st February Rev CF Spavould came as Minister's assistant in the interest particularly of the outstations. During 1941 the Ladies Guild contributed sufficient money to enable a sleepout to be attached to the Manse and a low wall erected around the church.

In February 1941, Mr Northcott Grimmett came to help with the churches at Cobdogla and Kingston, but by the end of May the Minister was again without an assistant. In addition to his other duties Rev Pleass commenced religious instruction in the school, as well as holding monthly services at the garrison of the Loveday Internment Camp.

After a Ministry of over seven years, during which steady progress was made, Rev Pleass left and was succeeded by Rev SW Parker who consolidated the work of his predecessors. Work was developed at Loveday where a service was held weekly and 18 children attended the Sunday School. Rev Parker gallantly carried on the work at Kingston and the struggling cause at Cobdogla, as well as his work at Barmera without any assistance, until ill-health forced him to retire in June 1947.

The Barmera church accepted the oversight of Pastor JCR Ashworth of New Zealand as a temporary pastor.

On September 29th 1947 the church held its twenty fifth anniversary when an Honour Roll was unveiled.

On January 11th Pastor Ashworth concluded his brief pastorate, and Rev RB Woods was inducted in February 1948. A Youth Club was active at this time and the Ladies Guild at Kingston was restarted after a lapse of several years.

By 1949 both Barmera and Kingston churches had cleared their final debts on their respective properties, and had so improved their financial position as to be able to offer a reduction of £50 per annum to the grant being made by the Parkin Mission to the district churches.

In January 1951 Rev Woods concluded his ministry, and the following month Pastor EGC Wisdom was inducted. During Pastor Wisdom's ministry much time was spent in serving and assisting the under privileged in the district. There was a pronounced upsurge of youth activity and Mr Ray Peterson, and Mr Ray Gifford were influenced to join the Ministry through Pastor Wisdom's encouragement and example. In August the CYF which was conducting a monthly evening service celebrated its fourth Birthday. A Junior Ladies Fellowship was formed and the Ladies Guild supplied the Manse with a new linoleum and carpet runner.

In 1953 a Pilot Group was formed. The Loveday Group was able to secure an ex-government hut in 1954 and erected for use as a church and hall. This was opened by the President of the Union on 12th September 1954.

At Barmera, a new Sunday School Hall was built and duly opened by Mr RG Hallam who was associated with the church since its inception and had given many years of dedicated service in many capacities. The hall was erected in the main by voluntary labour and was opened on 5th February 1955. Pastor Wisdom completed a ministry of five years, leaving in January 1956, when again Rev SW Parker returned to exercise a very acceptable interim ministry.

The River Murray floods upset all activities in the district. Kingston was completely cut off for many weeks. The rooms at the back of the church were used as headquarters for flood relief.

Rev CW Pope was inducted to the pastorate on 24th March 1957. In December 1957 it was decided to discontinue services at Cobdogla. An every person canvass was conducted during February 1958. The same year, extensions to the hall provided four more class rooms, and the church was extensively renovated. An electronic organ was given to the church and dedicated on 27th July 1958. Film services were held monthly. The Ladies Guild celebrated their 37th Birthday on August 6th 1959. Mr Ray Peterson and family left for Adelaide to enable Mr Peterson to study at Parkin College for entry into the Ministry. Sunday School teachers held a monthly luncheon on Sunday. A church prayer circle met each Sunday evening prior to the service. Both evening and day guilds were using a study booklet at their regular meetings. Seven new members were received into fellowship by confession of faith. The first Cradle Roll Service was held on 29th May when infants were enrolled.

During Rev Pope's Ministry the shocking state of affairs which existed at the Gerard Aboriginal Mission at Winkie was constantly aired and brought to the notice of the authorities by our church. As a consequence the "Upper Murray Association for Aboriginal Welfare" was established, and Gerard Mission passed into Government control. From our church Mr and Mrs JV Foot went to the reserve as Superintendent, while Mr and Mrs Barry Mudge went there to enable Mr Mudge to become the supervisor of agricultural and horticultural development. Rev Pope was appointed to the Aboriginal Advisory Board of South Australia. A teenage club was commenced for the girls. The 28th August 1960 was set aside as the day for the renewal of pledges given in the previously held every person canvass. Rev Pope concluded his ministry at the end of December 1962.

Rev AC Johnston commenced his ministry in January 1963. Following his arrival the church promoted activity to erect a Home for the Aged in Barmera, and during his sojourn in Barmera the home was built and occupied. He was Chairman or Secretary during this period.

In an effort to take care of the needs of the younger folk, the “Coffee Shop” was started, and although many hours were devoted to its successful operation, the results were not commensurate with the effort required.

Loveday Church was closed on 5th March 1967.

In 1966 the old Manse was demolished and a modern and attractive one was built on the same site. It was opened by Mr CT Locke on 11th December 1966. A reed-electric organ was donated to the church in August 1967.

On 19th December 1969 Rev Johnston relinquished his charge and Rev Trestrail filled the pulpit from January until April when Rev HR Ballard was inducted on 10th April 1970. At this time (May 1971) the supporters of the church were engaged in constructing a Caravan and Camping Area on the shores of Lake Bonney.

The Rev Ballard had been concerned with youth training and activities for some time, both as a Scouting leader and as a Church Boys Home Administrator. When the church was able to lease a section of land on Lake Bonney, he saw the opportunity to establish a Venturer Camp to train young people in outdoor activities. Members of the church gave hours of their time to establish a caravan park and camping area which they named Greenwood Park. The church’s direct involvement with the park ended in 1984 when the South Australian Education Department arranged to sub-lease the property.

The Rev W Paynter was inducted in 1975 and after years of discussion and preparation the unification of the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian Churches took place in 1977 and the Barmera Congregational Church became the Barmera Uniting Church.

No record of the Church’s activities would be complete without mention of the people who made the work of the church possible. They included Mr and Mrs A Appleby and Mr and Mrs H Watton, Mr and Mrs RC Hallam and Mr and Mrs CW Till served the church for many years in numerous capacities. Mr Hallam and Mrs Till were made “Life Deacons” of the church in appreciation of these services.

Among those who contributed so much to the church after its establishment were Mr and Mrs R James, Mr and Mrs HL Porter, Mr and Mrs CM Ayling, Mr and Mrs HT Dunstone, Mr and Mrs JV Foot, Mr and Mrs E Morton, Mr and Mrs A Chiles, Mr and Mrs A Packer and Mr and Mrs FC Chabrel.

CHURCH MINISTERS

Rev J H Datson	Dec 1919 - 1921
Rev A G McCullough	June 1921 – 1922 Oct
Rev A M Taylor	Nov 1922 – 1923 Feb
Rev W C Palmer	1923 – 1924 Mar
Rev A M Taylor	Feb 1924 – 1924 Mar
Rev A A Barber	Apr 1924 - 1924
Rev EW Sanders	Sept 1924 – 1925 Feb
Rev J Beukers	Feb 1925 – 1932 Apr
Rev G H Bayley	1932 – 1938 June
Rev LG Pleass	1938 - 1945
Rev S W Parker	1945 – 1947 June
Pastor J C Ashworth	Aug 1947 – 1948 Jan
Rev R F Woods	Feb 1948 – 1951 Jan
Pastor E Wisdom	Feb 1951 – 1956 Jan
Rev S W Parker	Feb 1956 – 1957 Feb
Rev G W Pope	Mar 1957 – 1962 Dec
Rev A C Johnston	Jan 1963 – 1970 Jan
Rev W Trestrail	1970
Rev H R (Bob) Ballard	1970 - 1975
Rev W (Bill) Paynter	1975 - 1980

Change to Barmera Uniting Church in 1977

Rev Trevor Oates	1981 - 1985
Rev E (Eddie) King	Feb - April 1986 (Interim)
Rev Trevor Byard	May - Aug 1986 (Interim)
Rev Ken Maher	Aug - Dec 1986 (Interim)
Rev Len Jude	1987 - 1993
Linda Sutton	March - June 1994 (Interim)
Rev Trevor Rogers	1994 - 1998
Rev June Ladner	April - June 1998 (Interim)
Rev John Cranmer	1998 – 2002
Rev Tony Chapman	May – August 2002 (Interim)
Rev Christine Garner	April - July 2003 (Interim)
Rev Carol Chambers	July 2003 – April 2008
Rev Rob Mayne	2009
Rev Allen Cameron	April - May 2009 (Interim)
Rev Brian Smith	June 2009 (Interim)
Rev Trevor Klar	July - Dec 2009 (Interim)
Rev Allen Cameron	Jan - June 2010
Rev Rob Stoner	Aug 2010 – November 2015
Rev Sandra Webb	March 2016 -

DEACONS and ELDERS

Deacons who were appointed in the early days of the church included:-

CW Till
HL Porter
EW Atkinson
RG Hallam
R James
CM Ayling

Elders were not elected until 1960

These were:-

EW Atkinson
J Foot
CM Ayling
K Dunstone
A Packer

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday School commenced in January 1921 with 9 pupils. Mr A Appleby was the Superintendent and he was assisted by WH James, F Ellis and RG Hallam. Mrs Shannon was in charge of the Kindergarten class. When she resigned Misses D and E Hubert took over.

When Mr Appleby departed in May 1923, Mr Clem Till became Superintendent and filled that position for 20 years.

The original wooden hut served as a Sunday School building until a new room was built, mostly by voluntary labour and opened by Mrs Till in June 1928. The large class room came into use in 1935 and the rear building was opened on February 5th 1955.

In the early days the children were trained for the Anniversary Services by Mr Clem Till and Mr Duncan Barnett.

Many church members have given valuable service as Sunday School teachers and thanks are due to them.

CHURCH GUILD and FELLOWSHIP

The first meeting of the Congregational Ladies Guild was held on August 29th 1923. Mrs Palmer, the mother of Rev WC Palmer was President, Mrs Laurel Till, Secretary, Mrs Gentle, Treasurer and Mesdames Wotton and Guy were also present.

These ladies arranged a church flower roster and planned a Church Fair. Meetings were held fortnightly in members' homes. Any money raised was used for the Church's immediate needs, to pay a church cleaner and to reduce the establishment debt.

Trading tables, fetes, bridge and tennis afternoons all raised money for such things as furniture and improvements to the manse, choir panelling and carpet for the church, Sunday School prizes etc. The members helped supply and serve morning and afternoon teas to the men working on the flood banks in 1956 and made gifts and donations to the local hospital, Felixtowe and Allambi Homes for the Aged and local families in need.

WOMEN'S EVENING FELLOWSHIP

It is believed that this started in 1953 with Joyce Applegarth as President. It lapsed and later Mrs Pam Pope, wife of Rev GW Pope was President in 1958.

Members enjoyed many social occasions with members of other churches and were entertained and instructed over the years by a wide variety of guest speakers. They carried out hospital visiting and for several years were rostered to do the church cleaning. They supported local and state wide charities as well as helping to furnish Bonney Lodge.

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

There are no records of the early Men's Fellowship groups but it is believed that they were in existence as early as 1925 but disbanded and reformed several times.

BARMERA UNITING CHURCH CHOIR

Soon after the building of our church was completed in 1922, a choir was formed presumably under the leadership of Mr Harry McKenzie who was one of the original fruit growers in the area.

Among the original members were:

Sopranos: Miss L Bawden, Mrs G Jones, Miss Guy

Contralto: Mrs C Till

Tenors: Messrs R James and C Till

Basses: F Barnden, Tom Bawden, Clem David, H McKenzie .

Later Mr F Barnden, the village blacksmith, took over as choirmaster. Another choirmaster was Mr Arthur Baker who was at one time a boy soprano in St Georges Chapel, Windsor.

Some of the earlier organists were Mr H McKenzie, Mrs C Till and Mrs R James. Mr Bert Ayling was organist for 62 years and choirmaster for most of that time.

Mrs Stella Bradey was a member of the choir for fifty years. It would seem that many of the anthems used came from Spicer Memorial Church and are still used on occasions. It is interesting to note that the price marked on them was 1½ pence each as compared with about our \$1 today.

The choir has a fine record of continuing service and has been invaluable leading the singing in Divine Service, and helping in the introduction of new hymns and hymn books. For most of the time the balance of voices has been good. Most country churches are unable to sustain a choir whereas ours is flourishing under the leadership of Mrs Marie Wright and Mrs B Duke as the principal organist.

Mr Jack Atkinson was a loyal member for many years and used to come to practice and for the services from Overland Corner, and today Mr L Webster travels from Kingston for the same purpose.

For a period of five or six years our church used to broadcast services over 5RM and of course the choir was very necessary then.

During an Eisteddfod held in Renmark (in the 50's) the choir gained first place against competition from choirs of other churches. In this instance we took our own organ with us.

The next visit to the Eisteddfod produced a second place. One of the anthems selected by us was "The radiant morn has passed away". The adjudicator was not too enthusiastic about it and said that it should have passed away long ago.