



A
HISTORICAL
PROFILE
OF THE
ROCKINGHAM — SAFETY BAY
(METHODIST) — UNITING CHURCH
IN AUSTRALIA
1940 — 1980

ROCKINGHAM UNITING CHURCH 40TH ANNIVERSARY
SEPTEMBER 22ND 1940 to SEPTEMBER 21ST 1980

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH

Today we are celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Rockingham Uniting Church. Only as one looks back, can one see the progress that has been made towards the present, the steps that have been taken, the lessons that have been learned, the large and small contributions that many people have made. All too often records have been lost or are inadequate and memories have faded, so the picture becomes incomplete. It is with these things in mind that a historical record has now been compiled which we trust is as noteworthy and interesting as the occasion demands.

Tremendous changes throughout the world, have been very evident in the past forty years and the Parish of Rockingham - Safety Bay has been no exception. The population of the town in 1933 was only 156 and that of the Shire 1,014 but despite this small number, the faith of the people was such at that time that it was important for them to worship. To their everlasting credit a few people began their Christian witness.

Although the first minute book begins in 1933, it seems that a Sunday School meeting was started in April 1932. These meetings were held in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Morrison in Fisher Street, and the first services held there were apparently led by a Mr. Aldis, a Baptist minister. Thereafter monthly services were led by men of several denominations until regular services were started in 1933 by the Rev. Arthur Meyer, who was then a Methodist Home Missioner stationed at Spearwood. These services were taken at the request of the Rev. Eric Nye of Fremantle Mission. Services continued in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Morrison for some nine months but then lapsed until a Home Missioner, Mr. Jules Johnstone came to live in this area. Regular services were then held in the home of Mr. & Mrs. J.H. Stone, parents of the late Mr. W. Stone, and later still as numbers grew, in the Agricultural Hall on the site of the present Library Hall. These services continued until the present Methodist Church was built. Mr. G. Grigg donated land for the Church and Manse in 1939. With fine impartiality, he also donated land in Parkin Street for the Roman Catholic Church in 1941.

Mr. J. Stone and Mr. J. Johnstone advanced money for the building of the Methodist Church in Parkin Street which appears to have been the first to be built in the town, although there was an Anglican Church Hall in Baldivis. The foundation stones of Methodist Church were laid on June 22nd 1940, by the Lt. Governor, Sir James Mitchell, K.C.M.G., and by Mrs. Morrison. At the completion of this building, two services were held before the official opening of the Church on September 22nd 1940. The offerings at the first service amounted to £3.4.2., and at the opening £7.11.5½. In his address at the official opening, Mr. Johnstone asked those present to "remember always, unless the Spirit of God remains, ye who have built will have laboured in vain" (Psalm 127).

It seems fitting that the first marriage celebrated in the new Church was that of Mr. Stone's daughter, Alice, to Alex Minchin.

Mr. Johnstone was the first of a long line of Methodist Ministers serving the Rockingham area during the ensuing forty years. Altogether there have been twenty incumbents. Most of these were Home Missioners or Students in training for the Ministry and here for only short periods. In 1943, owing to the illness of Mr. Johnstone, the Rev. Fred Sampson, now Superintendent of the Fremantle Mission, was asked to help out at Rockingham. At the time Mr. Sampson was a young man and a prospective Home Missioner. As Mr. Johnstone had used only a horse and sulky for transport around the Circuit, some other means of conveyance was necessary. The then Home Missions Director, the late Rev. J. Green, allotted £10 towards the purchase of a car, but Mr. Sampson himself had only £30. The late Miss Lucy Saw knew of a car, a Standard 10, which was for sale at a cost of £135. Miss Saw and Mr. Johnstone made up the deficit and the car was purchased. As there was no Manse, Mrs. Morrison opened her home to Mr. & Mrs. Sampson until he was sent to Lake Grace three months later, taking the car with him.

Subsequently most Ministers rode the Circuit on bicycles. In April 1948, there is a trust account for £3.14.0., being the cost of repairs to the Ministers bicycle. After Mr. Sampson's departure many visiting Ministers and Lay Preachers helped the Church out of difficulties and special mention must be made of Sister Edie Owens of Fremantle Mission, who came to Rockingham in October 1948, to recuperate from an illness, and remained here as Minister in Charge from December to the following March. Sister Edie later became Mrs. Ken Cowdell, and together Mr. & Mrs. Cowdell worked tirelessly, Mrs. Cowdell holding several positions including years as Circuit Steward and as organist for twenty nine years, Mr. Cowdell as Steward and Trustee until their sad passing within eight weeks of one another two years ago.

Soon after the opening of Rockingham Church, the war situation worsened, strappings of brown paper were attached to all windows and black-out curtains were placed to cover lighting at night. During February, and March 1942, members of the Ladies Guild met evacuees from Singapore and there were many who accepted the invitation to worship and join the fellowship of the Church. A large number of soldiers were stationed here as well as at the RAAF Radar Station at East Rockingham, so in June 1943, it was decided to have supper after the evening services preceded by a sing-song led by one of the soldiers. As a matter of interest to those who remember the Rev. S. Shearn, a retired Presbyterian Minister, he was at the time Y.M.C.A. representative for the troops in this area and brought a number of soldiers to Church by truck.

After the war, the building of a Manse was completed and opened on March 10th, 1947. Its builder was Mr. A. Findlater, who received one cheque for £224 in October 1946 and another for £400 in November from the Rockingham Trust. Some of the money

required was raised by free of interest loans from two or three families, who subsequently, with great generosity, converted their loans into gifts. Most of the rest was raised by the Ladies Guild who made the final payment of £159 in 1951. The Rev. A. Hawkins is thought to have been the first occupant of the Manse.

It is evident from the foregoing account of Church activities, that there must have been a strong and vigorous Ladies Guild working very hard behind the scenes. Minutes record that the Rockingham Methodist Ladies Guild was inaugurated in 1939 at the residence of Mrs. Morrison. Following this inauguration a meeting was held on August 12th 1940 when the following officers were elected:- President - Mrs. Morrison; Vice President - Miss Saw; Treasurer - Mrs. Mitchell; Secretary - Mrs. Whitehead. There were seventeen original members, Mrs. J.H. Stone, who was made Honorary Life Member, Mesdames Ward, Parsons, Whitehead, Findlater, Larkin, Ritchie, Campbell, Morrison, Hale, Bennett, Mitchell, Robins, Collell and the Misses Watts, Saw, and Ward. The annual subscription was 2s.6d. Minutes then suggest that meetings continued to be held at Mrs. Morrison's home until the vestry of the Church was available and that the first regular meeting on September 18th 1940, was the one that immediately preceded the official opening.

Members supplied afternoon tea for the official opening and for numerous occasions to follow. For several years wonderful and memorable annual flower shows were held to assist funds. The first, in 1941 raised £6.13.0. Jumble sales were held in the Fremantle Town Hall and in the Rockingham Church Hall prior to the opening of the Opportunity Shop in 1970. Cake stalls, Fetes, Concerts and Film evenings are among the many functions organised by the Ladies Guild to assist in numerous projects such as furnishing and improving Church properties, and pay the Minister's stipend. A Church bell was bought and dedicated. In 1957 the Communion Rail and Baptism Stand and carpet runner were placed in the Church. A piano was purchased for £150 in 1958. The Church Hall was lined in 1960, the front porch was enclosed, the glass doors were added and a hymn book case and notice board provided. In December 1969 extensions were added to the Church Hall with kitchen facilities for which the Guild worked extremely hard. They also bought carpet, lino and furnishings for the Manse. Members have always been responsible for flowers for Church services and weddings and also for Church cleaning. In recent years the Guild has installed a hot water system, new chairs and contributed to the purchase of a new piano. For many years Guild Ladies have given concerts at the Rockingham Nursing Home and continue to give small gifts to patients on Mothers Day and at Christmas.

"Since its inception devotions have firmly remained an integral part of each meeting and a source of comfort to many through the joys and sorrows of life. Indeed were it not for this and the Christian love and concern shown by so many during the years, no achievement would be worthy of recording". These lines are quoted from the Guild Programme on the occasion of their 25th Anniversary, but are still relevant today.

When, in the late sixties, Mr. A.H. Mead died leaving one-sixth of his estate (\$1,171.85) to the Church the Guild was relieved of one of the more pressing financial worries and it was decided to purchase an electronic organ at a cost of \$1,000. The organ was dedicated in January 1969, to the memory of Mr. & Mrs. Mead. In forty years there have only been four regular organists, Mrs. Robins, Miss Lucy Saw, Mrs. Edith Cowdell and Mrs. Doris Sewell.

In the meantime, while the Church in Rockingham was steadily growing, more outlying districts were not forgotten. In September 1949, a meeting was held at Safety Bay in the home of Mrs. Rea with the dual objects of obtaining some place locally where a Church service could be held, and of forming a Ladies Guild to raise money to build a Church Hall. Arrangements were soon made to hold Church services in the Progress Hall, (on the site where McLarty Hall now stands) and Guild meetings in the CWA Hall, since during the week the Progress Hall was used by the school children.

Six years later, on October 16th 1955, this small devoted band of women saw their dreams at least partially realized. In the previous year, an acre of land at the corner of Rae Road and Frederick Street had been bought at a cost of £1,240 and on it a building purchased from Woodman's Point at a cost of £425 was re-erected by the builders Rowe and Baladeras. Under the guidance of the Rev. R.E. Bramley, the Church was soon to become a centre of Community activity and found in Mr. Rowe an enthusiastic supporter and organiser. He became the Sunday School Superintendent, convener of a Young Peoples Club, and President of a Badminton Club. This last was a particularly popular one and drew a large membership, not only from Safety Bay, but from Rockingham as well. All clubs met weekly in the Church Hall, which was of course, also used by the ladies Guild for their meetings and social and money raising activities.

As there was no scheme water in Safety Bay at this time, the Rev. Bramley arranged with Mr. Karlowky of the iceworks, to pump water into the Church tank from his well next door. In 1957, the Home Missions Department paid off the remaining debt, and offered a loan of £200 to be repaid in five years at 1% interest. This was used by the Ladies Guild to help furnish the Hall in which undertaking they were greatly assisted by the efforts of Mr. Bramley. He personally built and installed the Pulpit, the Communion Rail, and the original wooden chairs.

In May 1964, a further $\frac{1}{4}$ acre block of land at the corner of Frederick and Minchinson Streets was bought for £50 from Mr. F.A. Payne. All blocks were then consolidated under one title, the trustees being Lucy H. Saw, George R. Thompson, Edith M. Cowdell, Minnie M. Larkin, Milton R. Maley, Bruce D. Meyer, William E. Cowdell, James Kelman, Arthur J. Pickles, George S. Sharp, Alexander J. Rowe, Kenneth M. Cowdell, all very familiar names. In August 1977 the title was transferred into the name of "Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (WA)".

The Church being the first in Safety Bay apart from the Roman Catholic community was one that served all Protestant denominations. In fact, Methodists were outnumbered ten to one in the Congregation. It was indeed a truly Uniting Church, so that when such events as Flower Shows and Garden Competitions were organised, it was not hard to get co-operation of most of the people in the area. In truth so popular did the Flower Shows become, that they became an annual feature of the district for thirteen years and were missed by a great number of people when they were discontinued.

Over the years, the Guild has been and still is a strong body within the Church. They have been responsible for the repayment of loans, the ceiling and lining of the Supper room, furnishings within the Church hall, apart from their financial obligations to Church Missions and Community Projects. The Guild has also remembered with gratitude the work done by members no longer with them and to honour their memory, memorials have been dedicated. A warm band of fellowship exists within the walls of our Safety Bay Church.

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE CHURCH

The 1950s, 60s and 70s brought very great changes to the town, but there are many gaps in the information to hand and one can only record known facts. The advent of big industry in the Kwinana area brought thousands of migrants, mainly British, to this country and the town of Medina was built in the bush to accomodate them. A Methodist Church was built there in July 1955 and attached to the Rockingham - Safety Bay Circuit. During 1956 and 1957 services were also being held at Naval Base and continued until March 1963. In 1962, Circuit finances showed a deficit of £19.18.10., and until 1968 the Circuit was assisted by a Home Missions grant which in 1956 amounted to £178.15.0. By 1960, the towns of Medina, Rockingham and Safety Bay were extending at such a pace that Medina became a separate Circuit, and Rockingham - Safety Bay were able to make their own way without the Home Missions grant. An indication of changing circumstances can readily be seen in a comparison of expenditure. In 1956, annual expenditure was £451.10.9., roughly \$903. In 1979 expenditure reached a total of \$26,473.94. Happily, from a deficit of £93.3.7., (roughly \$183.74) in 1956, the annual bank balance at December 1979 stood at \$3,799.42.

The suburb of Rockingham Park was built in 1970-71 providing housing for many more migrants, a people who having left family and life long friends half a world away were feeling lost and lonely. The new lifestyle threw many into confusion and the Rev. C. Lambert, who was then Chairman of the the District and presided over the quarterly meetings here, suggested that a Friendship Club be formed in the Church to help women find fellowship and adjust to the change in their lives. So it was that both the Methodist and Anglican Churches in Rockingham started Friendship Clubs. The Methodist group opened in May 1969, Mrs. Pat Cadman being the first President. As the women gradually found their own ways, membership lessened and the club ceased in