

STRATHALBYN

Pages 58 & 59 in Jubilee Pictorial History of the Churches of Christ

The plea for a return to primitive Christianity was advocated at Strathalbyn some thirty-six years ago. A little previous to this a few disciples resolved to remember their Lord in his own appointed way at Milang. There were living at a little place called Belvidere, about four miles from Strathalbyn, two persons (Baptists), who, learning of the above assembly, made it their business to attend Milang. Bro Goudie was their Evangelist. Shortly afterwards, meetings were held at the house of Mrs Burkett, one of the two persons who had attended Milang. Several persons became interested. A Sunday School was formed, and Mrs Jeff kindly placed a large barn at their disposal to accommodate the children. About this time Bro Earl and Porter made their appearance in Strathalbyn. A certain building, owned by Mr. Colman, now known as the Agricultural Hall, was used by the brethren for proclaiming "the good news". Hundreds of people attended, and many were obedient to the faith. Mr Colman requiring this building for storing wheat, then allowed the disciples another building close to the present Railway Station. This building also being required, Mr. Colman again met our requirements by placing at our disposal "The Old Mill". Mr. Colman, although not one of our number, was exceedingly good to the cause. Very rarely was he absent from the meetings. He was always punctual and was on nearly every occasion accompanied by his Newfoundland dog. Mrs. Colman was also very kind and became a sister of the church. As there were good prospects that a prosperous time was in store, the little band decided to build a chapel for their meetings. All the brethren - and some friends - gave their time and money for this object. Some carted stone, some worked at the building, others not able to give their time during the day, assisted in the moonlight, and at last, thanks to the great self-denial of these noble men, the building was erected. We had now a place of our own. The church was organized, and Bro Earl conducted the first meetings. So the little church started on its career. We are pleased to say that we have still with us today a few of the little band, viz., Sisters Burkett, Gordon, and Leslie. The church made very good headway and became fairly strong, numbering some 60 to 70 members. But troubles and difficulties were in store. Several of the prominent workers sold their properties and went north to secure land which was then being sold. Others soon followed. People were bent on trying their fortune in these new fields and so the numbers dwindled away, until at last, no one being able to carry on the work, this fine chapel was closed. It seemed such a pity, after the hardest difficulties had been surmounted, that this building, capable of seating 250 people, should remain for a considerable period with closed doors. The Masonic Lodge desiring a building, I believe offered to buy the property, but the trustees declined, and it was a good thing they did so. The Masons, not being able to secure it, built on the adjoining allotment. Shortly afterwards, A Gordon, senior, with his wife and family, returned to his old home. They immediately opened the chapel, and for a long time assembled by themselves. Gradually others came along and joined the church. W Judd made an effort to revive the work, and was followed by GB Moysey and J Colbourne who were each stationed here for a time. Several were added to the church. Valuable assistance was rendered by TJ Gore, who time after time did his utmost to help the struggling few. Sometimes we gained strength but soon again became weak. A Gordon, senior, to his credit, stuck to the place through it all, and though surrounded with difficulties which many would never have faced, never yielded an inch, and so remained faithful till God called him to his reward. Too much praise cannot be bestowed on our departed brother and his family for their herculean efforts for primitive Christianity. Had they not remained true to their post, it is quite probable we should not have a Church of Christ here today. RG Cameron, who was laboring with Milang and Point Sturt, came over occasionally and assisted us, and a few more were added. The church had to depend on supplies from Adelaide for a long time, and so we struggled on. In the year 1900, the brethren arranged with the Home Mission Committee for an evangelist to labor in our midst, and accordingly AJ Harris started his work, the members assisting to support him. Bro Harris succeeded in arousing an interest in Strathalbyn, and had very good meetings. The church then numbered 30 members. After laboring here about seven months AJ Harris resigned, seven persons having been received into our midst during his term with us. The church again applied to the Committee for an Evangelist. They complied with the request, and sent along HJ Horsell, a student of TJ Gore and AC Rankin's training class for the preaching of the Gospel. He commenced on 16th May 1901, a difficult task. During AJ Harris' departure and the commencement of HJ Horsell's labors the meetings had dropped back. He set to work to build up the church. An interest was aroused in the members, and they have supported Bro Horsell well. The result has been a gradual increase week after week. Every succeeding month our average attendance improves. At our last anniversary we had over 200 present in the afternoon, and in the evening any were obliged to go away, no room being available. The interior of the chapel has been thoroughly renovated. HJ Horsell's labors have been very successful, and our membership has now risen to 52. The church is in a better position than it has been for many years. HJ Horsell is greatly respected by all, and we pray that our future may be more blessed.