

PARRAMATTA MISSION: HERITAGE SUNDAY – Supplement, 21 June, 2020



This Sunday 21 June is ‘Heritage Sunday’ at Parramatta Mission. It is an important part of the annual celebration of our mutual history, which commenced with the ministry of Rev. Samuel Leigh in 1815 and has extended for over 200 years of ‘worship, witness and service’ – and transformative care – at Parramatta and Westmead.

Our 2020 acknowledgements include the 43rd anniversary of the UCA (1977), the 10th anniversary of Wesley Apartments (2010), the 40th anniversary of Koopartoo (1980), the 135th anniversary of Leigh Memorial Church (1885) and the 200th anniversary of the birth of Methodist missionary, Rev. John Watsford (1820).

It is also 10 years since we celebrated ‘Festival 2010’ – a special, month-long Mission event at Macquarie Street which included the release of our first heritage book, *Our Church*, the 125th anniversary of the opening of Leigh Memorial Church, a costumed 1885 Sunday School re-enactment, a Women’s High Tea, a Presbytery Youth Celebration, a ‘Back to Leigh’ reunion, an Oral History project (inc. 30 senior congregation participants), a combined congregations luncheon at the CFM and a performance by the Sydney Welsh Choir. Great memories.

Recent Heritage Committee publications include essays on Catherine Leigh and Elizabeth Lawry – now available online at <https://stjohnscemeteryproject.org/> and our 2019 books (available for purchase or borrowing), *Luminous: The Stained Glass of Leigh Memorial Church, Parramatta* – and - *Samuel Leigh: First Wesleyan Missionary to Australia and New Zealand*. These books are the latest of 12 heritage books produced by the Mission since 2010. All are deposited with local, state and national libraries – and the UCA archives – thereby ensuring that the Mission’s history is available to a broad readership and in archival care.



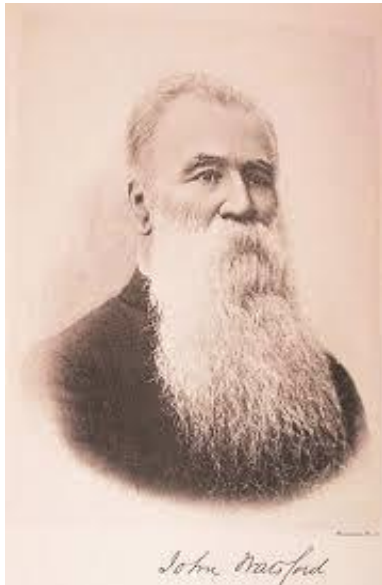
PM’s Heritage Committee, including representatives of all three congregations, also continues to undertake archiving, research, writing, community liaison and heritage advocacy tasks on behalf of the Mission, while reporting to the Church Council. Next year, we will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the opening of our first ‘Lawry’ Chapel (pictured) and Sunday School at Macquarie Street in 1821 – and – the 30th anniversaries of the Westmead congregation at Queens Road (1991), and the official inauguration of the ‘Fijian Parish’ of Parramatta Mission (Leigh Fijian congregation) (1991).

Thank you to everyone for your support of our Parramatta Mission Heritage Committee and myself for the past 11 years. It has been a privilege to research and write about the Mission’s history, and to be in the company of others whose passion inspires them to do the same. The example of our forebears is one defined by faithfulness and courage in the face of often unimaginable odds, including war and severe economic hardship. At every turn, they did not waver. May their “staying power” and ingenuity inspire us all in this challenging year of 2020.

Liz de Réland
21 June, 2020.

2020 ANNIVERSARIES

200th anniversary of the birth of Rev. John Watsford (5 December 1820 – 24 July, 1907)



‘Father’ John Watsford was the son of James Watsford, a pardoned Parramatta convict who was converted by Rev. Samuel Leigh and became the first royal mail coachman in NSW. John attended the King’s School and was dramatically converted at the age of 18 while attending a service led by Rev. Daniel Draper in the Mission’s ‘Lawry’ Chapel. After a period of probation, John became Australia’s first locally born and trained Wesleyan missionary and was appointed to the Viwa islands, Fiji, in 1844. After a brief return to Australia, he was again appointed to Fiji between 1851 and 1853 – during which time he assisted Rev. James Calvert in translating the New Testament. On his return to Australia, Watsford had a distinguished career in a number of parishes in NSW and Victoria, where he ultimately retired. His preaching style was dynamic and articulate, drawing large crowds, and he was held

in high regard by the Methodist Church. In 1878, he became President of the Conference and lobbied for a maintenance of strict membership regulations for Methodists and the introduction of volunteer Methodist scripture teachers to state schools. In retirement, Watsford continued his evangelical efforts and passed away, aged 87, in 1907. His popular autobiography is titled *Glorious Gospel Triumphs* (1901): <https://archive.org/details/gloriousgospeltr00watsiala> A ‘bust’ of John Watsford in Leigh Memorial Church (undated), is affectionately regarded.

10th anniversary of the Official Opening of Wesley Apartments (9 March, 2010)



This year, we acknowledge the 10th anniversary of the official opening of Parramatta Mission’s Wesley Apartments by NSW Governor, Prof. Marie Bashir, AC (pictured). An accommodation facility for the families of seriously ill children undergoing medical treatment – and situated directly opposite the Children’s Hospital, Westmead – Wesley Apartments has provided 10 years of high quality care. Ably supported by the PM congregations, and notably the Westmead congregation, for the past decade – the Apartments remain an important point of community outreach and hope.

43rd anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia (22 June, 1977)



This year marks the 43rd anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia. In 2017, the Mission celebrated the 40th anniversary of the UCA with an anniversary service and luncheon, and the release of a book titled ‘Pilgrim People’ – containing the thoughts & recollections of over 100 members of our three PM congregations. Assembly statement, ‘We are the Uniting Church’: “Formed in 1977 as the first truly Australian church, we’re on a journey together. We’re here to serve God and seek hope, compassion, justice and peace in God’s world. We call ourselves a pilgrim people.” <https://assembly.uca.org.au/weareuca>

40th anniversary of Koopartoo (opened 30 April, 1980)



The Mission's 'Koopartoo' (an Aboriginal word meaning 'Fresh Start') was opened by The Hon. Robert Ellicott, QC, Federal Minister for Home Affairs in 1980. A working farm with group accommodation facilities at Kellyville, it was designated for "Youth at Risk" (aged 18-24). Although eventually re-located/ no longer a 'farm,' 'Koopartoo' remains one of the Mission's key Youth & Family Services programs – providing independent living and general support for young people in need in Sydney's west.

135th anniversary of Leigh Memorial Church (opened 21 June, 1885)



On 21 June, 1885, the new Parramatta Methodist Church (later named 'Leigh Memorial' in recognition of founding minister, Rev. Samuel Leigh) was officially opened by a selection of church and state dignitaries. Designed in the Victorian-Gothic style by English-born architect, James Tosh and built by local Methodist timber merchants/builders, Hart & Sons (who also constructed Parramatta Town Hall), it was a soaring triumph for Parramatta Methodism. Today, the heritage church stands as a welcoming place of worship and spiritual refreshment in the heart of Parramatta – and surrounded by the mass re-development of Parramatta Square. Since 2019, the church has also housed 'Buraga,' an artwork by Darug painter, Leanne 'Mulgo' Watson.

10th anniversary of 'Festival 2010' (6 – 27 June, 2010)

This special event at Leigh Memorial included a busy program with multiple highlights over four weeks, inc. the release of the Mission's first heritage book, *Our Church*, a costumed '1885' Sunday School re-enactment, a Women's High Tea, a Youth Celebration and the Mission's first Oral History project using digital recording technology. Festival 2010's catch-cry was: 'Valuing the Past, Claiming the Present, Seeking a Future.' (Denham Grierson, 1984).

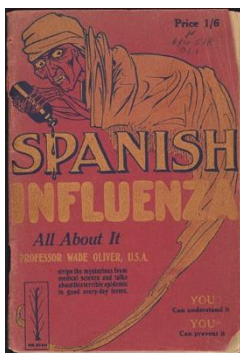


Some of the Festival 2010 Volunteers (from left): Siva, Vera, Samantha, Ruth, Margaret, Liz, Nell, Mae, Betty, Meg, Col, Parriss, Darlene & Marcel.

Parramatta Mission and pandemics



During the early phase of Parramatta Mission's history in the **19th century**, various disease outbreaks and epidemics impacted the Parramatta township and claimed multiple lives. Many of these were due to typhoid or dysentery, while others were influenza-based, of overseas origin – and with severe respiratory complications. The first child of Rev. Walter Lawry and Mrs. Mary Lawry, and Rev. Samuel Leigh's wife, Catherine, died during separate pneumonic influenza epidemics in 1820 and 1831. It was a time when only basic medical help was available to sufferers – and that was often more harmful than the 'cure.' Vaccines, antibiotics, ventilators and other emergency care were unavailable until the next century.



In **1918-19** when the Spanish influenza pandemic claimed at least 50 million lives worldwide, life at Parramatta Mission continued much as normal. The pandemic is not addressed in available church records from the period and the leaders and members of Leigh Memorial were more preoccupied with caring for returning WWI soldiers and their families and overseeing the initial stages of the church spire's demolition. In its minutes, the Parramatta Municipal Council of the day noted that most cases of the illness were being cared for at the Quarantine Station, North Head and at rural quarantine camps. Anecdotally, some Parramatta residents wore masks when leaving home and avoided large gatherings, but sanitisers, social distancing and widespread testing were not available. Due to its susceptibility via local ports, the city of Sydney's response was more decisive. Schools were closed and large gatherings were banned. Ultimately, 15,000 Australians died as a result of the Spanish flu.



In **2020**, a new pandemic (a novel coronavirus known as 'COVID-19') arrived in Australia. Worldwide, it has infected nearly 7 million people, claimed over 400,000 lives, severely impacted international economies and caused mass job losses. The Mission and other places of worship have been in 'lockdown' for some time. It is the first time in the 135 year history of Leigh Memorial Church, including through two world wars, that its doors have been closed. Worship services and meetings have instead, been conducted online via 'zoom' since March. Plans are currently underway to re-open, however strict NSW govt. and UCA guidelines involving social distancing, disinfection of surfaces, hand hygiene and contact tracing will need to be observed. At present, the virus remains an active threat to public safety.

Heritage enquiries: 9891-2277/ wecare@parramattamission.org.au

Parramatta Mission pays respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather: the Burramattagal people of the Darug nation and their elders past, present & emerging. © Parramatta Mission, 2020.

