

ARCHIVAL ARTEFACTS

A series describing some of the items in the Synod's Archives by Aubrey Quick

The Revd Aubrey Quick was ordained in the Methodist Church in 1949. Retired now at Mitcham, he is the Secretary of the U.C. Historical Society and spends what his wife considers to be an inordinate amount of time in the U.C. Archives.

More than one young candidate for Home Mission service in the Methodist Church may have waited in the outer office at "Otira" with some trepidation and wondered at a curious mechanism which seemed somewhat out of place on the ornate marble mantelpiece. The accompanying card gave a graphic description.

BUSH REPAIR JOB

New collar rings for Ford "A" Transmission Joint.

This remarkable repair was accomplished over two hundred miles from a garage or anvil and with no tools others than those on the truck. It took an old prospector eight days of constant work before the patrol padre, accompanied by the Revd Colonel A. T. Holden, Director of the Methodist Inland Mission, was able to drive the vehicle safely back to base.

The Revd Colonel Holden was the first director of the Federal Methodist Inland Mission, formed in 1926. He undertook four inland journeys to review the work of the Mission. The "Bush Repair Job" took place on his second journey at Alex Kerr's sheep station 150 miles from Alice Springs in July 1930. The patrol padre was the Revd T. C. Lithgow, a Queenslander stationed at Alice Springs.

Some extracts from Holden's diary tell the story, and at some points correct the inscription which for more than 60 years has stood with the universal joint.

Friday, 18th July ... The road got rougher, and the bad places more difficult to navigate. Moreover, strange noises were developing in the gear box, or somewhere, and we were all puzzled. She was not pulling so well, and when we got into sandy places she easily got stuck, and difficult rises had to be tried again and again, with strenuous pushing, before she could get over them. It was getting dark and all hope of reaching Pederick's was going, and we began to wonder if we could even make Kerr's. Fortunately, though, we did, though with much difficulty and much grating noise especially in low gear, and after it had got well dark. So here we were compelled to camp, and wait until morning before any examination could be made of the car. There was no accommodation in Mr Kerr's one-roomed structure, so there was nothing else for it but to lie on the rough, uncomfortable ground for another night. A fire was lit, tea was prepared by Mr Lithgow's skill and then we all lay down to rest(?). I kept all my clothes on and my Khaki British warm, and I am sure my generous companions gave me more than my share of the blankets. It is bitterly cold again, but as there is no long grass near we are able to have quite a good fire. About 1,000 sheep and lambs are in the yard close by so we shall have music....

Saturday 19th July ... The first excitement after breakfast is to find out what is wrong with the car. The gears are first removed and all is right, but when the universal joint is opened up, lo and behold the bearings are broken in pieces, and a solemn silence rested upon us for a few thoughtful minutes. There is no spare part for such an unusual break, either here or at Alice Springs, and we are now stranded, for this car cannot take us farther. We are 150 miles from Alice Springs and there is no telephone or telegram and no passing traffic. Fortunately, we are close to a settler's hut, so that our food supplies will not run out, but how are we to get back to Alice Springs and catch our train (only fortnightly) which leaves next Wednesday morning? The prospects are gloomy. Mr Kerr says that no one else is likely to come along this way for another three months anyhow. If we could only communicate with Alice Springs some one would come out for us, but no one knows our plight and no one knows where we are. Everyone has his considering cap on. Mr Kerr has no car and no horse. No one can walk the journey because there is no water except for camels....

Sunday 20th July ... Another young rooster goes to pot. Some ancient oatmeal is obtained from Kerr, and this provided an early morning fill up and the cockerel simmered until midday. All day long work has been proceeding with a view to make a new collar for the universal joint. The task seems impossible in the absence of materials, tools and appliances. Tubal Cain, the first artificer in metals, had no more primitive tools than we here. Mr Lithgow has risen to the occasion wonderfully, and is all energy. He does all the cooking and is the live-wire in everything else.

Monday 21st July ... I don't know what is going to happen if we cannot reach Alice Springs. My insulin and nujol supplies will last only two more days. I have a stock in Alice Springs and expected, of course, to get back there before last Sunday. However, "sufficient unto the day" etc. Work on the car proceeded all the morning, when there was a call off for lunch which consisted of more goat, more damper and some Johnny cake baked in the camp oven. Whilst fighting with the flies for our food, our optimistic chief engineer Kerr remarked that ants were worse to swallow with your food than flies because they tasted. We have plenty of both here. Work was resumed immediately afterwards and continued through the afternoon, though the hope is fast disappearing that there is any chance of getting away in time to catch the train even if we succeed in moving at all....

Tuesday 22nd July ... My breakfast was a little porridge and goat's milk and a cup of billy tea. I am now on my last bottle of insulin, and have begun to take half doses and shall put myself on half rations, and be as careful as I can to limit my carbohydrates. Whilst at breakfast we discussed what we could do for lunch for our supplies are pretty well done. The resourceful Mr Lithgow went out with a shotgun and got seven wild pigeons with one shot. He then made a damper with some of Mr Kerr's flour, so our midday meal was sure. Meanwhile, the engineering work is proceeding with forge, hammer and file. Nearly every available tool is broken, and yet they go on undaunted, inventing some makeshift or other to take its place. Beginning with a slab of steel forming part of the blade belonging to his boring plant Mr Kerr and Mr Townsend are creating a new universal joint. They have been working at it for over three days already and it looks as though success is going to crown their efforts. Mr Kerr tells

us every day that he could see the angel in the marble from the very first....

Wednesday 23rd July ... We have been stranded here for five days and five nights and it is always "tomorrow" that we are going to get away. By the end of the day the broken joint was remade and all is ready for assembling the car tomorrow.

Thursday 24th July ... At half past four, the work of assembling was completed, a successful trial run was held, and off we started on our return run of 150 miles to Alice Springs. When it came to the last it was a hurried "goodbye" to Mr Kerr and his flock of pet lambs. The car ran beautifully but soon it became dark, still with the spotlight guided on the winding road with his right hand and driving with his left hand, Mr Lithgow sped on. After 40 miles we passed the turning into [Webb's], eight miles in and still travelling on....

On Friday, 25th July 1930 the party reached Alice Springs. Holden's final comment was "We now claim some knowledge of life in the open."