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THE VOYAGE OF LA VENTURA AND OTHER ADVENTURES
The story of Andrew Mackenzie Meldrum

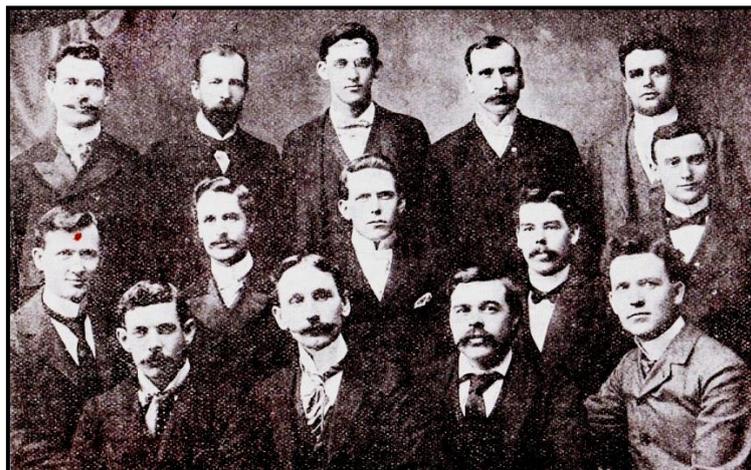
The Conference of Churches of Christ in NSW will consider for publication short papers on historical and theological topics relevant to the development Churches of Christ. The publication of a paper does not constitute an official endorsement of the views expressed therein.

Enmore (Sydney) Tabernacle has had many remarkable preachers. One of the most remarkable was Andrew McKenzie Meldrum. Meldrum was an adventurer, academic and anthropologist. He was an effective evangelist and a successful business man.

The son of a stonecutter, Meldrum was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1876. At 16 years of age he left Scotland to travel around the world with his brother. During his travels he took thousands of glass photographic slides. He later used these photographs, and photographs from later travel, to illustrate many informative lectures. His love for anthropology (then a young science) may have been kindled during this trip.

Early Education

In 1894 he went to the United States and enrolled in the College of the Bible at Kentucky University, Lexington. He graduated Master of Arts in 1902, a qualification awarded to those who had completed both the English language and Classics courses. Soon after graduating he came to Australia and took up an appointment as minister of Swanston Street, Melbourne, Church of Christ. It is not clear why Meldrum decided to come to Australia, but in doing so he followed in the steps of several College of the Bible graduates including James Johnston, MA, and American W.C. Morro, BA. Meldrum would probably have shared classes with Australians T.G.A. Bagley, W.B. (“Ben”) Huntsman, and P.A. Davey. In 1897, the latter was secretary of the Kentucky Student Missionary Society, of which Morro was an executive committee member. The venerable A.B. Maston visited the College of the Bible in 1898 and met members of the Victorian Club (British Empire students) that included Meldrum.



*College of the Bible Class of 1899. Meldrum is in the middle row, far right.
Huntsman of Melbourne is in the middle row, second from left.*

Meldrum was essentially a romantic and an adventurer. In an enigmatic illustration published [below] in the Kentucky University magazine *Crimson* in 1899 he dreams of what he wants to do in the future. He seems to be saying that he wants to know more about the world. Perhaps it was that dream that brought him to Australia. It does at least suggest an interest in geography. The vision was already there.



What Meldrum is going to do

“What Meldrum is going to do”

In Melbourne

A report in the Melbourne *Argus* as early as April 1903 shows him fully involved in the ministry at Swanston Street and the work of Conference. Significantly,

Meldrum followed the aforementioned James Johnston at the city church. Robert Lyall, secretary of the church for many years writes:

James Johnston . . . was followed by A. Mackenzie Meldrum whose preaching attracted large audiences during his stay with us . . . and he did good work amongst the young of the church.

Meldrum had a particular interest in the physical development of young people. The school hall erected shortly after his arrival was fitted out with a gymnasium for YMCA type activities. Graeme Chapman notes that Meldrum visited Ballarat in September 1904 and preached at morning and evening services in September 1904, and gave “interesting and forceful addresses to large audiences”.

At the Jubilee Conference of the Victorian churches in 1903, Meldrum gave a keynote address on “The Church for the Twentieth Century”. Later that year he was a guest speaker, along with A.B. Maston, at the South Australian Conference. A report on the Conference reads “Messrs. Andrew Meldrum and A.B. Maston delivered forcible [forceful?] and earnest addresses”. Meldrum must have impressed because he was invited by the Conference to write the Conference Essay for the following year. At that Conference, the introduction of pioneer A.T. Magarey as president-elect was received “with ringing cheers”. The young Meldrum was already moving in distinguished company!

The Victorian Conference appointed Meldrum to the state Foreign Mission Committee in 1904, a move that may reflect an emerging interest in anthropology. At the Sunday afternoon meeting, Meldrum preached the Conference Sermon on the topic “Christ: The World’s Greatest Teacher”.

In 1905, as Melbourne District Chaplain of the Loyal Orange Institution, Meldrum presided over a meeting called in connection with the Tercentenary of the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, that is, the failure of Catholic sympathizers associated with Guy Fawkes to blow up the British House of Lords. In those more sectarian times, Meldrum was stoutly Protestant. He was still at this stage a British subject, as were all Australians.



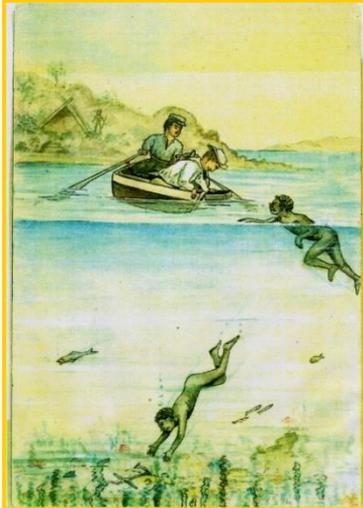
Meldrum at Swanston Street, 1904

Short ministries seem to have been a characteristic of Meldrum’s career; he was an entrepreneurial, adventurous spirit who derived satisfaction from meeting the challenges of

geographical and gospel frontiers. He was less comfortable in the static roles of established ministries.

The Voyage of La Ventura

Between 1906 and 1908 he embarked on an ambitious program of travel and research that took him around the Pacific, through Asia and the Middle East and eventually back to Scotland. The first part of this journey was in a motorized ketch, La Ventura. The boat was approximately nine metres long. It had a small five-horse power engine and was equipped with a small galley and primitive facilities—a small ship for such a long journey. With a companion, Charles Henry Gould, described as a painter, he travelled through the Barrier Reef en route to New Guinea where he explored the Fly River. Along the east coast of Australia he did evangelistic work, speaking in centres like Lismore, Brisbane, Maryborough and Rockhampton. It is estimated that he and his companion travelled about 2000 kilometres on their little vessel.

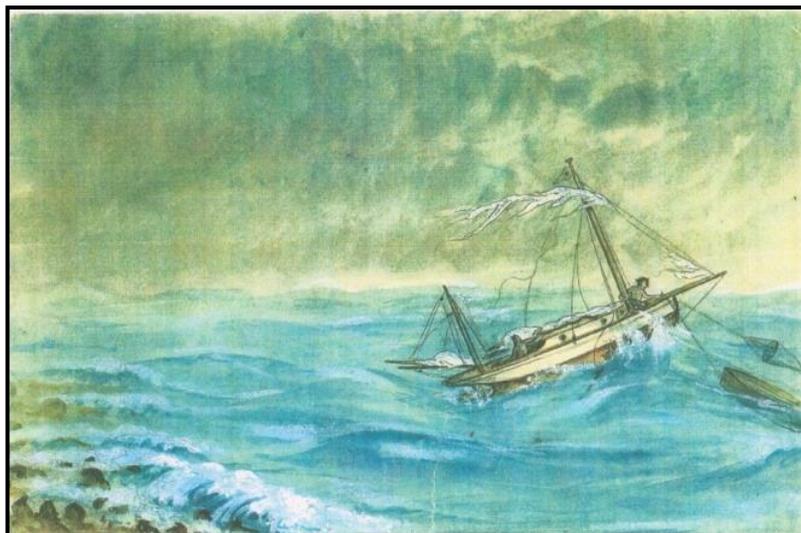


Meldrum and Gould in New Guinea waters.

One of the explorers is looking at the sea floor through a glass-bottomed box. Meldrum found New Guinea natives as among the fiercest in the world

Following a cyclone, they abandoned La Ventura [possibly in Borneo] and travelled by other means to the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Ceylon, India, and Tibet and eventually to the Middle East including The Holy Land. He studied the culture of the lands he visited, located artefacts and took opportunities to propagate the Christian faith. At

some stage Charles Gould separated from Meldrum who went on to Scotland. Gould subsequently had a brilliant military career. He and his father played a small role in the commencement of the church at Red Cliffs, near Mildura in Victoria. His story is told in Occasional Paper No.10.¹



La Ventura battles the cyclone. Note the shredded sails and submerged dinghy. Painting attributed to Meldrum but was possibly the work of Gould, a signwriter.

Back in Scotland in 1907, Meldrum undertook evangelistic work and became reacquainted with a childhood friend, Helen Scott Crockatt of Glasgow. He sought permission to marry her. This was refused by Helen's mother, Cora, until Meldrum could

offer her daughter a more settled situation. The Crockatt family was a well-connected Churches of Christ family in Scotland, with possible family connections to Thomas Campbell of Northern Ireland. *Who's Who in America* indicates Meldrum did some preaching in Scotland and undertook further study.

Oregon, USA

In March 1908 Meldrum took up a ministry appointment at First Christian Church Pendleton, Oregon, USA. Now in a settled situation, he returned to Scotland in September 1908 and married Helen Crockatt. The marriage celebrant was John Crockatt, an uncle or cousin of Helen's, and a prominent Churches of Christ evangelist.



A. Mackenzie Meldrum Helen Meldrum
(Photos by Douglas Strain, courtesy of Dr. Charles Dailey)

Before Meldrum returned to Pendleton, however, there was a fire in the chapel where his books and artefacts were stored. The wooden building was totally destroyed and so were Meldrum's belongings. The warden of the church sent Meldrum a telegram with the grim words "Church burned. Books and all lost. 2 Corinthian 4:8" ["We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair"]. Meldrum responded with a three-word reply "Courage. God Lives." The relatively new building was worth around \$15,000, but the insurance company paid out only the policy amount of \$8000. Meldrum's books were worth about \$1000 [which puts his personal loss into some perspective].

Meldrum and the church were faced with the massive task of rebuilding. Plans were prepared, and a building program was launched. The cornerstone of a beautiful concrete and granite building was laid in 1909. In the midst of the rebuilding program, Meldrum found time to organize another church 70 miles away at Ione, bringing together a congregation, collecting funds and consulting with the Pendleton architect about a building.



Downtown Pendleton circa 1903
Sign reads "Gospel Meetings Every Night at the Christian Church"

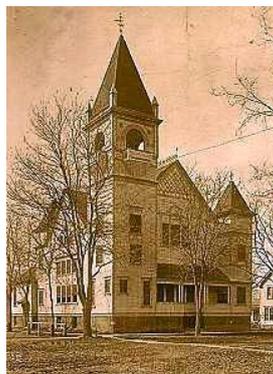
By the spring of 1910, construction was sufficiently well advanced at Pendleton for a building dedication. The building had fine architectural features. One source attributed the fine stonework and the durability of the building to Meldrum's boyhood experience as the son of a stonecutter in Scotland.

Mass evangelist Charles Reign Scoville and his evangelistic team, who were in the area, participated in the dedication. Scoville was later to conduct extensive evangelistic campaigns throughout Australia (1912) under the auspices of Churches of Christ. In 2010, First Christian Church Pendleton celebrated the centenary of its "new" building. It currently has a membership of around 500 and is a Disciples of Christ affiliated congregation.



*1909 Pendleton Building
(Photo from Pioneer History by Dr Charles Dailey)*

Meldrum did not wait around to enjoy the benefits of the new building, however, and moved later that year to the pastorate of Athena Christian Church, Oregon. Ever restless, he submitted his resignation at Athena after twelve months. The elders rejected it and so he stayed a further three years. Such a refusal to accept a resignation was almost unprecedented in Christian church circles, but Meldrum survived the embarrassment and got on with the job. During his ministry he "attended many meetings and conferences throughout the state and region, organized two evangelistic campaigns, presented numerous illustrated lectures, and helped organize the Holman Christian church in 1913. In that year, Meldrum became a naturalized American citizen.



Historic Athena Christian Church

In 1914, Meldrum and his family moved to Spokane, in the neighbouring state of Washington, to participate in the establishment of a new Christian College, Spokane University. Meldrum was employed initially as a field officer and special lecturer. However, in 1916, he was appointed its Chancellor, becoming President in 1917.



President Meldrum

Meldrum had great plans for the new college and soon gathered a fine faculty and student body. In a report in the *Christian Standard* in 1917, Meldrum wrote:

The college is delightfully situated on an undulating plateau above the famous Spokane Valley. The University owns 168 acres. . . It is the largest college of our brotherhood west of the Rocky Mountains . . . and [in an allusion to the contemporary world situation] . . . the territory allocated to Spokane is three times greater than the German empire.

By that year the student body numbered 186. The University awarded Meldrum a Doctor of Divinity in 1921.

In 1922, however, tragedy struck; his wife Helen suffered a stroke. Meldrum was in the eastern states at the time undertaking deputation work. He raced home to be with his wife and joined her a few days before she died. She was only 34 years of age. Helen had been his co-worker at the University, teaching in the area of modern languages and had contributed much to the new institution. They had six children. Later that year, Meldrum resigned as President of the university, but continued for a time in his previous role of Chancellor. The death of his wife was possibly a catalyst in his decision.

For some time, Meldrum maintained an on-going association with the city, if not the university. It is understood he invested successfully in real estate. Around 1918 he was involved in the establishment of Spokane Historical Society Museum to which he later gifted a number of South Sea Island artefacts, a collection of exotic butterflies and a black opal from Lightning Ridge, NSW. He served for a time as Vice-President of the Spokane Historical Society. A curious reference in *The Argus* in 1928 records that Meldrum had written to fellow Scot and ardent churchman, J.A. Wilkie of Ballarat, asking him for a plan of the municipal observatory at Mount Pleasant, together with the cost of equipment and other details because “it is proposed to establish a similar observatory at Spokane”.

Being free of executive responsibility at the University enabled Meldrum to resume travel. In 1924 he visited the orient and undertook preaching engagements in Australia and New Zealand. In the midst of this travel he remarried (February 1925), to Louise Mitchell of Melbourne. In Melbourne, in 1925, he gave a public lecture in the Independent Hall, under the auspices of the Protestant Club of Victoria, on “Protestantism and Romanism as a World Force”. He may have returned briefly to the USA in 1926 but in 1927 he made a further trip to New Guinea undertaking considerable research. A report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* reads:

In 1927, he [Meldrum] led an expedition to New Guinea and obtained valuable fossils, including primitive skulls, which he presented to the Field Museum, Chicago.

Back in the United States and now living in the Los Angeles area, Meldrum was invited in mid-1929 to become President of Pacific Bible Seminary. He joined the fledgling college during a time of crisis. The founding President died the day that classes started. Nevertheless, classes went ahead in the basement of Alvarado Church of Christ. However, Meldrum did not stay long. As previously noted, he had no heart for administrative and political jungles; the real jungles of New Guinea were easier to handle! In the wider context, Campbell/Stone related churches were riven by the debate over theological liberalism. Meldrum had no love for Higher Criticism, then fashionable in theological circles, and this concern may have contributed to a decision to move on.

Pacific Bible Seminary survived this crisis and morphed through changes in location and name to emerge as Hope International University; today a Christian Church associated college with around 1700 students. Spokane University fared less well and was caught up in the financial crisis of 1934. It was reorganized around 1935 as Spokane Junior College and moved into the city. Its theological students were transferred to Eugene Bible College, later renamed Northwest Christian College. Part of its former site is now the home of University High School, the name “university” continuing the past association.

Meldrum tarried for a while in the Los Angeles area. A brief notice in the Los Angeles *Times* for 11 January 1930 announced that: “Dr. A. Mackenzie Meldrum will speak on ‘Through the Seas in a Thirty-Foot Boat’ at the Central Y.M.C.A”. This lecture seems to refer to his 1906 journey to New Guinea. But there is a little ambiguity about how many journeys he did make to New Guinea. A brief report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on his death refers to a journey to the Mamberamo River of (then) Dutch New Guinea (now an Indonesian province):

Dr. Meldrum . . . gave up ministry in 1930 to become an anthropologist. He left America to explore the Mamberamo River, Dutch New Guinea, but abandoned the trip because of Japanese hostility and came to Australia.

The Mamberamo River is a large Amazon like waterway in the north of the province. At that time it was largely unexplored with some local tribes never having seen Europeans. Apparently Japanese settlers had taken up leases along the coast and Meldrum deemed it unwise to proceed. At that stage America had strained relationships with Japan, and creating an international incident was not on his agenda. This journey appears to have been undertaken around 1932 - 1933. Meldrum returned to Australia and entered into an interim ministry at Marrickville Church of Christ. He spent four months at Marrickville and after a much appreciated ministry accepted a call to the nearby Enmore church, the “mother” church of Churches of Christ in NSW. He laboured there for about twelve months before taking leave in 1935, to visit Europe. During this trip he attended the World Convention of Churches at Leicester, and also the “Polish convention” in Kobryn, Poland.

It is not clear exactly to what this “Polish Convention” referred, but Kobryn was the location of the Polish Home Mission office of the Churches of Christ in Poland. At the time Churches of Christ had some 65 established churches in Poland with over 100 evangelists. A surviving photo (following) suggests the “Polish convention” might have been a meeting of some of these evangelists.



This photo is labelled simply "Poland" and is presumed to be the group Meldrum (second from right) met with at Kobryn, Poland [now Belarus]. Delegates from Kobryn attended the World Convention at Leicester in 1935.

The visit to Poland alerted him to serious concerns about Nazi Germany as the following report suggests:

Dr. A. Mackenzie Meldrum, a leading anthropologist and Church of Christ minister in charge of the Enmore Tabernacle, who returned from a world tour by the *Lurline* today, said that in Hitler's Germany the usual matriculation examinations had been replaced by tests for the ability to fly an aeroplane. Dr. Meldrum said that the subtle encouragement offered to young men in Germany to qualify as airmen . . . was typical of the general thoroughness of Herr Hitler's rule.

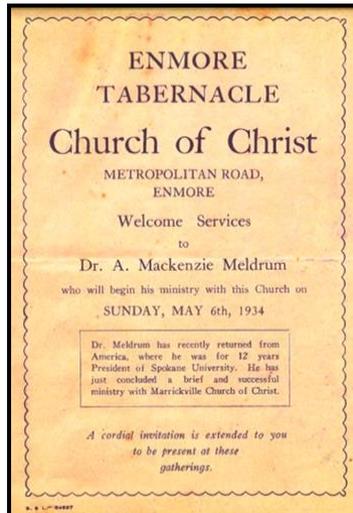
This was an ominous sign of the disaster that was enveloping Europe.

On his return to Sydney he committed himself once again to local ministry and "good progress" was reported at Enmore. In 1936, Enmore celebrated the golden jubilee of its "new" building (opened after the church's relocation from Newtown). In that year there were eighteen additions by faith and baptism and twenty-seven in 1937, the last full year of Meldrum's ministry. The nominal membership base of the church at that time was approximately 350. It was still a substantial congregation.

During his time at Enmore, Meldrum continued to serve the wider church. He was the guest speaker at a community service arranged by the NSW Council of Churches and on several occasions was the guest speaker at PSA ("Pleasant Sunday Afternoon") Services conducted by the then Methodist Central Mission in *The Lyceum* Theatre. These were popular events in the city's life in the 1930s and could attract up to 1200 people. Meldrum participated in the Centenary program of the Victorian Conference in 1934, addressing a public rally in the Melbourne Town Hall. A report reads:

Tea will be served in the main and lower hall at 6.15 pm and a public meeting will follow at 7.15pm. Mr. Ernest Tippet will lead a combined choir while Mr. Herbert Davis will be the organist. Dr. A. Mackenzie Meldrum of Enmore (NSW) will deliver an address.

Melbourne Town Hall, of course, was just down the road from where Meldrum started full-time ministry in 1903 at Swanston Street Church of Christ.



Invitation to the welcome service for Meldrum, 1934

Meldrum retired from Enmore in January 1938 at the age of 61. It is hard to believe that after such an active life he simply “gave it away” at such a comparatively young age. It is possible that he did anticipate further travel perhaps back to Washington State or California to visit his children and grandchildren, and old friends. However, there is no accessible public information about his further activities. By 1938, overseas travel had become dangerous, and impossible from September 1939, when German armies began pouring into Poland. Furthermore, his wife Louise was much older than he, and it is possible that health problems were beginning to plague them both.

In retirement, he and Louise moved to Military Road, Cremorne, on Sydney’s sedate lower north shore, with little (at that stage) to disturb them other than the rattle of trams on their way to Spit Junction and Balmoral. Military Road is now a clogged major thoroughfare to Sydney’s northern beaches. Andrew and Louise had no children together, but it seems that Louise had relatives, perhaps a brother or sister, living in the Cremorne area.

Meldrum died of a debilitating kidney disease at nearby Mosman on 20 October 1943 and was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium. The veteran minister Danny Wakeley, who succeeded him at Marrickville church, conducted the funeral. Obituaries were published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *the Spokane Chronicle* and *The Christian Evangelist* (Indianapolis). The latter reads (in part):

Dr Meldrum was an authority on the South Pacific and has given lectures on New Guinea civilization and life in other islands now [1943] in the news. He was widely known as a scientist, explorer, minister and public speaker.

A postscript to his life is found in an “In Memoriam” notice placed by Louise in *The Argus* twelve months after his death, perhaps for the benefit of their Victorian friends. Louise died in 1956 in her 90th year, also in the Cremorne/Mosman area.

Altogether, Meldrum spent more than a third of his career in Australia and the South Pacific, but he is not remembered here. He was a man of strong intellect, able to combine both a passion for science and the gospel—a Renaissance man. He is attributed as having visited every continent and more than 50 countries, and carried out research in New Guinea, Africa, China and Tibet. He was a fine ambassador for Australian Churches of Christ, being much in demand as a lecturer and speaker.

Meldrum was described in the American *Who's Who* as being one of America's finest poets. One of his poems adorned a Christmas Greeting card sent out by the Enmore Tabernacle. A true Scot and a lover of golf he was unsurprisingly a devotee of the Scottish poet Robbie Burns. The following are the final verses of a poem he wrote about the bard:

Let not the poet be despised,
Nor smile with those who would,
Since many a man's been canonized,
Who did the world less good.

Where e're Scot dwell, where don't they?
Each year this day returns
We'll meet in social harmony
To honour Robert Burns

Come, toast the bard from Doon-side,
Old Scotia's best loved seer,
Though 'neath the Southern Cross we bide
His name we still revere.

Meldrum still rests 'neath the Southern Cross; a plaque in Northern Suburbs crematorium marks the spot. That's a strange final resting place for the former President of Spokane University. It's unlikely that anyone has visited his memorial for over seventy years.



By a quirk of fate, a message from Meldrum still lingers in cyberspace. Until recently, the following endorsement by him appeared on the website promoting the recuperative values of Hepburn Spa, Victoria, resort:

After having travelled in 45 countries of the world, and having seen most of the famous springs, both hot and cold, I unhesitatingly say that Hepburn Springs are superior to most of them in native beauty, invigorating force and curative powers.

Perhaps it's just as well the site web-master did not know that Meldrum was a doctor of divinity and a minister of the gospel. Otherwise this might have been seen as a sinister immersionist plot! Meldrum would have appreciated the joke.

The Wisdom of Mackenzie Meldrum

“None now believes that man descended from the monkey, and the missing link is now regarded as something of a myth”—Dr Meldrum a noted US anthropologist, arriving in Australia on the *Monterey* (*Sydney Morning Herald* 7th November 1933)

“There were three great mountain peaks of revelation – Moses, the prophets and Jesus Christ all of whom offered guidance to God’s people. If man was to love God, he must become interested in the things in which God was interested. God was interested in man; therefore man must be interested in his fellow men”—in a service arranged by the NSW Council of Churches (*Sydney Morning Herald* 31st March 1934)

“Our professors are learned men. But they do not profess to be wise above that which is written. They are here to teach God’s word and not to manufacture Bibles of their own” – the mission of Spokane University (*Christian Standard* 25th August 1917)

“The brain of man grows from the time he is born and never stops working. The brain of an ape stopped working when the animal was three years of age.... God is the Father of man, but not the Father of the apes. He was the creator of apes”—in an address at a united intercessory service at the Sydney Town Hall (*Sydney Morning Herald* 10th January 1935)

“Despite the world’s progress in the last 50 years, the mental calibre of today was no higher than it was when the discovery was made that cereals were food, and fire was an aid to man”—from an address to the Parramatta district convention of Churches of Christ (*Sydney Morning Herald* 21st January 1935)

“I feel some new common language should be created for the golfer to address his ball.... Believe me I have heard good fathers, as well as good Presbyterians, use language that is not in the prayer book, nor was it Latin, and claim they were only talking to the ball. There is nothing in the world like a good game of golf to keep a man humble” —musing on the game of golf (*Spokesman Review* 15th May 1932)

[The foregoing quotes from the press should not be taken as fully representative of Meldrum’s anthropological or theological views]

Note: This Occasional Paper is an updated version of chapter 15 of Hayward, H. and Nutt, D. *Enmore Incorporated*. Sydney: Freshhope, 2014.

Reference:

1. https://freshhope.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Brothers-in-Arms_lowres.pdf