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C.T. FORSCUTT

WOMEN'S COLLEGE EDUCATOR
AND ENTREPRENEUR



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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.

Charles Thomas Forscutt (1857 – 1931)

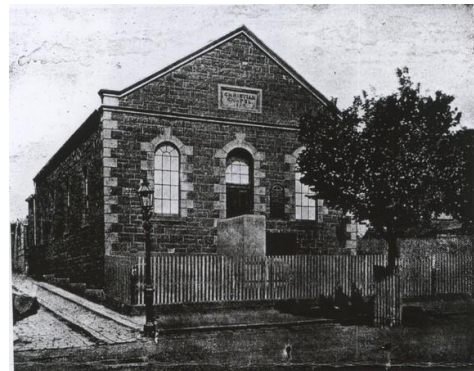
Charles Thomas Forscutt was born in Edwardstown, South Australia in 1857 to Samuel Thomas Forscutt and Emma Blackeby. Charles, ‘CT’ to his friends, became known for establishing a boys’ and then a ladies’ college in the new suburb of Bexley/Rockdale.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mainline Protestant denominations in Australia developed primary and secondary schools to serve the educational needs of their adherents. While these were not exclusive of children from other denominations, they were, and remain relatively elitist organizations designed to produce men and women of refinement. Institutions with names like Methodist Ladies College and Presbyterian Ladies College come to mind. Whether for reasons of doctrine, lack of interest, or lack of a critical mass within the communion, Churches of Christ collectively never became involved in the establishment of “denominational” school systems. Some individual church members however made remarkable contributions in setting up Christian schools. An early example is the Scottish/American bible colporteur Eliza Davies who in the mid 19th century, established schools at Mt. Pleasant near Kiama on the NSW south coast, and at Flat Rock, Willoughby.

Another example is Charles Thomas Forscutt, who established first a boys' school, then a ladies' college on a heritage property in the new Sydney suburb of Bexley / Rockdale. As a young man, Charles joined the church at Hotham in the 1870's.



Charles Thomas Forscutt



Chapel, Chetwynd Street, North Melbourne.
North Melbourne (Hotham) Church of Christ (c1900)

Student Years in Kentucky

Charles was converted after hearing an address by an American evangelist.¹ Like other young men of the church, his skills as a potential preacher were developed in the local church debating society. As a result of this experience, Charles was encouraged to train for the ministry and he joined Kentucky University at Lexington USA in 1878, enrolling the Arts course at the College of Arts and the Classical course at the College of the Bible, graduating in 1886. This was a long period of studentship. Many young Australians attended the College of the Bible in the later 19th century, however most candidates for ministry completed only the three-year English course with biblical components. The classical

course included the study of biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek and was effectively postgraduate. Charles was thus educated beyond the immediate requirements of ministry at that time, although he was keen to defend the importance of knowledge of biblical languages in theological training.

Arguably, Charles' education was a good preparation for academic leadership in a grammar school. As a ministerial student, he had several pastorates in the Stone-Campbell heartland of Kentucky. Charles is credited with having handled the repair and refitting of the Christian Church at Oxford KY in 1881.² This church had an "apostolic succession" stretching back to the Disciple pioneer "Raccoon" John Smith.³ Later, Charles ministered to the church at Ruddle's Lane not far from the Cane Ridge Meeting House associated with Barton W. Stone and the Kentucky revival. Charles records that in his last service at Ruddle's Lane in June 1886:

... Three persons joined [the church] so we protracted the meeting several days....and by Friday....rejoiced that eighteen more were added.⁴

Because of their neutrality, Australian students were often distributed to parishes which had been riven by the American Civil War. Charles recounted preaching in churches where some twenty years after the Civil War parishioners wore their guns to church, with the Unionists sitting on one side and the Confederates on the other. Charles was always critical of the Australians who trained in the USA but did not return to Australia (estimated by him in 1886 to be only about one in five). He decided not to do this. Passing up a lucrative offer of a professorial appointment in the USA, Charles entertained ministry invitations from the churches at Cheltenham, Victoria and Enmore, NSW. Enmore held the challenge of ministering to a church with a new chapel in a new location and he accepted its offer.

Ministries in Australia

En route to Sydney, Charles spent a few weeks in Melbourne. He found the city had changed considerably since his departure almost nine years before. He reported in *The Christian Standard* that Melbourne was now a city of around 350,000 persons with twelve Churches of Christ and around 2000 members, served by eight full-time ministers. Charles took the opportunity to appeal for more evangelists to come to Australia and was warmly welcomed at a public meeting at his home church at Hotham presided by the eminent A.B. Maston. Charles preached at several city churches and visited Ballarat and Geelong before entraining for Sydney where he was met by a delegation from Enmore and other Sydney churches.

In the 1880s, the church at Newtown had outgrown its "Christian Chapel" and erected a formidable building in the adjacent suburb of Enmore. Charles' appointment was designed to coincide with the opening of the new building, shortly afterwards named "Enmore Tabernacle," on October 24, 1886.

Charles spoke at the opening services and the official welcome and reception, conducting his first baptisms on 3 November 1886. Music at The Tabernacle was still acapella, and though Charles was allowed to preach, as an unmarried man he could not preside.⁵



Enmore Tabernacle, c.1900 (Jubilee History)



Charles, Olive, and Louisa Forscutt c.1910
- Rockdale City Council

In January 1888, Charles married Louisa Jane Francis (1867-1951), who exercised an enormous influence in his later career. In April 1888, Charles advised the church he would not be renewing his contract once his term expired. The following month, Charles visited the Manning River area preaching to gatherings at Taree, Chatham and Cundeltown; and later, Dubbo. Charles was farewelled from Enmore on 15 October 1888 and with Louisa, left for Melbourne.

During his term as minister at Enmore, 150 people were added to the church.⁶ For the next two and a half years, Charles undertook evangelistic campaigns and short-term ministries in Victoria. This included a period of almost twelve months at Hope Street, Geelong Church where he had an effective ministry. In 1890, Louisa gave birth to their first child, Alice Francis. Then in May 1891, the Forscutts put their furniture up for auction, the advertisement showing an impending departing for Europe.

Rockdale College for Boys

It seems the young family returned to Sydney, however as Charles was destined for a different vocation - the record indicates that in 1892, Charles established a small private school, the *Rockdale College for Boys* at St. Peters not far from his former parish of Newtown/Enmore. Taking advantage of the bank crash of the 1890s, Charles then bought a stately home, "The Heaning", in Gladstone Road, Bexley. The college was moved there. *Rockdale College*, as it was now called, functioned as a boarding college for boys and attracted the sons of some NSW's leading families.

Charles promoted the school strongly and it appeared to have a rich sporting and social life centred on concerts, speech days and garden parties. End of year prizegiving were grand affairs - used not only to reward students but to publicize the school. A report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* indicates an attendance of 300 people at the prize distribution of 1902. It offers the following description:

The Bavarian Band played selections during the afternoon. Archdeacon Langley presided and among those seated on the platform was the Hon. H.T. Waddell who distributed the prizes. Devotional exercises were conducted by the Rev. Scott-Fletcher...The Rev. C.T. Forscutt ... said that the closing year had been one of the most successful in the college history...with 84 students on the roll including many from distant countries such as India, China, Fiji etc...⁷



Rockdale College Cricket Team – Forscutt front left.
-Rockdale City Council

Rockdale College continued to flourish and in 1904 a two-storey brick complex meant for more dormitory, classroom and teacher accommodation. Run as a Christian school, the boys were expected to attend a Church of England service each Sunday unless their parents preferred otherwise. As the above report shows, clergy took part at school functions. Around this time, Charles bought up other parcels of land in the Bexley/Rockdale area to secure the future of the College and his family. A second daughter, Olive Emma, was born in 1903.

Bexley Ladies' College

Following a tragic accident in 1906 (related apparently to a student falling from a veranda) the boys' college was closed, but the facility reopened in 1908 as *Bexley Ladies' College*. The College was to be “an exclusive finishing school for the daughters of wealthy gentlemen.” Charles stayed with the successful format of the boys' school but added “refining” subjects like music and painting to the curriculum.

Charles' older daughter, Alice, an accomplished musician, prepared pupils for public music examinations and a comprehensive range of women's sports were offered. The report of the prizegiving of December 1910 lists reveals a wide range of subjects including drawing, book-keeping and shorthand.⁸



Tennis, Ladies' College grounds, c1910 -Rockdale City Council.

The report also showed the dux of the College was Miss Hazel Rofe. Hazel Rofe was a member of an Enmore Church of Christ family and later became the aunt of the long serving NSW missionary, Rosalie Rofe.



Louisa Forscutt (seated right) with students. Alice is standing on the far left. -Rockdale City Council.



Speech Day in the Grounds of Bexley Ladies College - Rockdale City Council.

As at Rockdale College, the Forscutts managed to attract high ranking politicians to speech days and garden parties hosted at Bexley Ladies College. Whilst war clouds gathered over Europe in 1914, a 'by invitation only' garden party was held in the college grounds to meet Prime Minister Joseph Cook and Mrs. Cook, along with W.E. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson, the Speaker of the Federal Parliament (then based in Melbourne). An account of the event in *The Sydney Morning Herald* gave no hint of the impending crisis enveloping the world and Johnson appeared to use his speech to defend his performance as Speaker.⁹ During the war, the College scaled back its non-curricular activities, and energy was put into the war effort. A charge was imposed for the annual concert with the proceeds going towards the "Belgian (i.e., Flanders) funds". Louisa Forscutt and two other ladies set up the Bexley branch of the Red Cross with a purpose of raising funds to aid the war effort. The group met regularly in one of the college classrooms. In 1917, Charles and Louisa's older daughter Alice married William F.H Melleuish, an accomplished local musician, whilst their younger daughter, Olive, married Enos Hudson at the Enmore Tabernacle in 1926.

Retirement

In 1920, Charles Forscutt was 63 years old and decided to retire. Control of Bexley Ladies College was handed over to Charles' daughter, Alice who with her husband, William, continued to run it conjointly for the next 15 years. Released from grind of school administration, Charles devoted his energies to other interests. He was a man of strong religious commitment and strong political passion. Notwithstanding the upper/middle class pretensions of his schools, Charles was not beyond haranguing the crowds in Sydney's Domain; and despite the clerical garb and title, he never outgrew his association with the "brethren and sisters" at Enmore Church of Christ, attending services there occasionally and preaching.

Charles was a patriot, empire loyalist and royalist and served as president of the Protestant Defence Association. On one occasion, a speech in the domain on the Irish situation provoked a near riot. He

tried unsuccessfully to raise public and government interest in a tour of the battlefields of Europe and Gallipoli where some of his “boys” had been killed in the fighting. The proposed tour involved equipping a ship, travelling to the battle areas and planting shrubs and trees in Australian war cemeteries. He spoke out against the objections to the visit of Australia by the Prince of Wales in 1920 and wrote a hymn “God Save the Prince of Wales” in the prince's honour. Unwisely, as it now seems, he allowed school premises to be used by elements of the New Guard which later led the putsch against the Lang Labor government and was linked to the infamous cutting of the ribbon by Captain De Groot at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1931.

Frustrated in his attempts to lead a tour to the battlefields, Charles and Louisa travelled overseas privately in 1922. They visited relatives in England, made a pilgrimage to Amiens in France to visit the battlefields and Australian war memorials there. They then travelled to the USA to visit churches and places linked to Charles' student days. He was still remembered by older members of the congregations he served. The couple returned to England in 1928. This visit was part of the Scottish-Australian delegation to landmarks associated with the birth and early years of the explorer and navigator Captain James Cook.¹⁰ The program for the pilgrimage lists his name and a vice president. He addressed several gatherings apparently in this capacity. Close to Charles' heart was his old home church at Hotham (Chetwyn Street, North Melbourne). He had previously visited there in 1918, but in 1930 took off with Louisa in his 1928 Ford tourer to visit the church for its Diamond Jubilee. At 73 years of age, Charles was believed to be one of the church's oldest surviving members. The trip was no mean undertaking at that age, in such a car, and over the road conditions at the time! Charles wrote a poem especially for this Jubilee occasion. Clearly Hotham had a special place in his heart. The poem – sentimental but moving – recalls his memories of others (the “Greens, the Geddes, the Floods etc) who served the Lord faithfully in that place. It reads [extracts]...

Some sixty years ago today,
 Since this church saw it natal day,
 Her children meet as years go by,
 To think of those beyond the sky...

Bring back in thought and mem'ry dear,
 “Our Fathers” names whom we revere,
 Green, Geddes, Flood, Fergus and Pearl,
 Clark, Horton, Minahan and Earl...

Methinks, I hear “My Mother's Prayer”
 When first I left her tender care
 And wandered o'er the world so wide,
 I feel once more she's by my side...

IT CAN'T [Charles' emphasis] be long till folks here,
 Shall feel the throb of death's dread fear,
 So let us live, that when we die,
 We'll meet our loved ones in the sky.

To what extent that second last stanza is biographical is not clear – but it suggests the role of a caring mother in his life's journey. Certainly, within six months of his visit to Hotham, Charles himself “felt the throb of death's dread fear.” In December 1930, Charles and Louisa attended the College speech day as special guests but shortly after, he became ill and died on April 7, 1931. A funeral service was held at the College followed by interment in the Methodist section of Rookwood cemetery. Services were conducted by his old friends - former Enmore ministers - G.T Walden, R.K. Whately, and Ira Paternoster.

His biographer¹¹ describes him as “a great evangelist, a persuasive speaker and a competent administrator.” And indeed, he was. He was somewhat of a polymath - with a wide range of interests and opinions. His real interest, however, appears to be in education - interests which he passed on to his children and grandchildren. His daughter, Alice Melleuish, was an accomplished musician and served Bexley Ladies College as principal for 36 years. His late grandson Ian Hudson (1928 - 2009) was a greatly respected primary school teacher; and his grandson, Wayne Hudson, holds professorial positions at Charles Sturt University and the University of Tasmania. A great-grandson, Gregory Melleuish, is an associate professor at the University of Wollongong. Charles' son-in-law, William Melleuish, died in 1935 at the age of 44, leaving his wife Alice to continue as sole Principal of Bexley Ladies' College. The college closed in 1956 and Alice Melleuish died in 1962.

REFERENCES

1. Possibly O.A. Carr, who as a graduate of both the College of Arts and the College of the Bible of Kentucky University, may have served as an exemplar to Charles Forscutt, who followed a similar academic program.
2. [www://rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kyscott/Oxford.htm](http://rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kyscott/Oxford.htm).
3. Ibid. "Racon" John Smith was an influential Disciples of Christ frontier evangelist. The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement describes him as "largely self-educated yet devoted to constantly deeper study of the Bible" (p.691)
4. Hudson, N. p.7
5. In his report on NSW in the *Jubilee History*, R.C. Gilmour writes curiously that at the start of the 1890s "our musical culture was down in the depths of the ocean. Now [1900] we have a fair number of talented musicians. Some of these are entitled to put mystic symbols such as ALCM or LLCM in company of their names" (p.306).
6. The Jubilee History reports over 200 additions – including conversions in other areas of NSW.
7. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15/12/1902 p.8
8. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22/12/1910 p.9
9. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27/7/1914 p10
10. Associated with the bicentenary of the birth of Cook. It's not clear how Charles Forscutt came be associated with the Scottish-Australian delegation.
11. Noelene Hudson – see bibliography.

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Foster, D.A. et al., *The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Eerdmans Publishing: 2005.

Hudson, Noelene. *The Life of Charles Thomas Forscutt 1857 – 1931*. Privately published family history. Noelene and her husband Ian – referred to above – were active in Churches of Christ in NSW for many years. Noelene was president of the NSW CoC Christian Women's Fellowship in 1986.

Maston A.B. (ed). *Jubilee Pictorial History of Churches of Christ in Australia*. Austral Publishing, 1903

Rockdale City Council – Many photos.

The Sydney Morning Herald – various issues as shown in references.