



Friends of the Auburn Tower Newsletter

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Auburn Personalities: Samuel Charles Brittingham FRVIA (another in an occasional series of articles)

The role of Alfred Dunn as the architect of the buildings now known as Auburn Uniting Church is well known. Less well known is the input of Samuel Brittingham, member, Trustee and architectural advisor for over 40 years.

Samuel was born in Muckleford, Victoria, in 1860. He joined the State Public Works Department as a trainee in 1875, aged barely 15. He rose through the ranks to become Chief Architect in 1915. During his time with the PWD, he was responsible for such notable public buildings as Parkville Post Office¹ (1889, Victorian Heritage Register H1167), Bourke Street West Police Station (1889, H0655), Mont Park Hospital for the Insane (1917, H1872) and the Old Arts Building, University of Melbourne (1919, H0924). He left the public service in 1922 to enter private practice.

He married Edith Lillie (Lily) Joynt in about 1900, and they had two sons, Lindsay (b 1904) and Geoffrey (b 1907). They lived in Hawthorn for most of their married life. Lily died in 1937.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1914.

Samuel was elected as a Trustee of the Auburn Methodist Church in 1923, and his architectural skills were soon called upon. In 1924 he designed the brick wall which surrounds the property on three sides, replacing the former picket fence. It was completed in 1925, "to the general satisfaction of those concerned" at a cost of £423. He was then asked to ascertain the cost of installing electric lights on the new wall at all entrances.

In 1926 he was asked to act as Secretary to the Trustees in Mr Whitehead's absence overseas.² He also formed a sub-committee to look into repairs to the electric lights in the Church. The sub-committee reported in 1927 that a whole new scheme of electric lights, for Church, Hall and fence would cost about £200, and it was agreed to make this a project for 1928.

In 1930, Samuel convened a sub-committee to investigate and report on heating the Church. Cost estimates varied widely. The Trustees decided to experiment with six electric radiators around the periphery.³

In 1931, Samuel recommended the immediate treatment of the Church floor to remove borers. The Trust noted that there were no funds (the Depression having started to bite in Auburn?), and resolved to borrow up to £300 if necessary. The repairs were completed in 1932 at a cost of £84, and Samuel was thanked for his time in supervising the work. His next sub-committee was charged with looking at the

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¹ Postal services were a State responsibility pre-Federation

² Sadly for researchers, his handwriting is much less legible than Mr Whitehead's

³ The 'experiment' lasted for 20 years, gas heaters finally being installed in 1950

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Auburn Personalities (continued)

question of a new 'platform' for the Sunday School Hall.⁴ He devised a plan to alter two classrooms and erect a platform, and this was accepted in principle. After some debate with the Sunday School Superintendent, the platform was created on the east side of the Hall, where it remains today.⁵

In 1932, during the darkest days of the Depression, the Trust asked Samuel to provide an estimate of cost to bring the whole property up to a "proper state of repair", at the request of Trustee and philanthropist Frederick Cato.

His estimate was:	Repairs to Church interior & exterior	£849
	Seat cushions	£140
	Carpet	£42
	Platform to Hall	£80
	Other	£60
	Total	£1,171

Mr Cato responded immediately, offering to contribute £1,000 to the cost of renovations if the Congregation could raise £200. This challenge was accepted, and Samuel was instructed to prepare specifications and call tenders. By 1933, the work was in hand, and he reported that Mr Beaumont's tender for painting the Church interior was £239/10/0. It is a sign of the depressed conditions that, not only was the re-painting carried out for this modest sum, but was completed in under two months. The Church re-opened on Sunday 2 July 1933, albeit without carpets and cushions, still en route from England. The Hall platform was ready for a concert by the Lydiard Street⁶ Choir on 21 October, and the honour of declaring the platform open fell to Samuel Brittingham.

In 1937, Samuel was on a sub-committee to consider the offer of a 'lady member' of £100 for an illuminated cross on the Tower. The sub-committee reported that it would prefer an alternative scheme, to erect lamps on the gate pillars along the Oxley Road frontage, to be completed by July, the golden wedding anniversary of Mr and Mrs Langley, the donors. The Trustees adopted a special Minute of Appreciation for Samuel's work in connection with the lamps:

"That this meeting of the Auburn Methodist Church Trust places on record its deep appreciation of the works of Mr S C Brittingham in connection with the erection of Thanksgiving Lamps given by Mr and Mrs Langley on our Oxley Road Church frontage.

"The design of the lamps was drawn by him and the oversight of their manufacture and placing in position, which involved much time and technical knowledge, was a service most readily given by him to the Church."

The meeting also agreed that a similar lamp be erected over the front doors; it is likely that Samuel designed this as well. At the same meeting, he was appointed Secretary of the Trustees, following the death of Mr W E Whitehead, with Mr E W Whitehead as Assistant Secretary.

In 1938, Samuel was given leave of absence to visit England. He returned in time for the Trust meeting of March 1939, again writing the minutes in his spidery hand. At the May 1939 meeting, he was put on a sub-committee to decide on the placement of a stone from Wesley's Chapel in London to mark Auburn's 50th Anniversary. In October, he reported that a casket containing a copy of the Jubilee souvenir booklet and other papers had been placed in a cavity behind the Wesley stone, unveiled in September.

Late in 1939, Samuel's buildings sub-committee had to report that repairs required to the timber verandahs of the Manse would be so extensive as to require re-building, and it would be more economical to remove the verandahs altogether. With the benefit of hindsight and heritage listing, it is easy to criticise this decision, but, after nearly 10 years of recession, and the nation again plunged into world war, it would have been difficult for the Trustees to justify the expenditure of significant funds on restoration.

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⁴ The upright Methodists not wanting a 'stage', with its theatrical connotations?

⁵ Although it has been modified to provide much-needed storage space

⁶ presumably Ballarat

⁷ All lamps have recently been repaired, re-painted and re-wired following over 75 years of exposure to the elements

Auburn Personalities (continued)

Samuel's last duty as Secretary was to form a sub-committee to look at what internal renovations might be required in the Manse to make it ready for the next Minister. In December 1941, he announced his resignation as Secretary. Edward Whitehead was appointed to replace him. The Trustees adopted a special Minute of Appreciation:

"That this meeting desires to place on record its sincere appreciation of the long and faithful service rendered by Mr S C Brittingham, who, for nearly 40 years, has been church member, architectural advisor or Trust Secretary. During this period of service, many problems have been met and the Trustees have learned from long and loving association, to trust his experience and judgment in all matters pertaining to the care of the properties. Many improvements in both church and [Sunday] school, as well as in the adjoining Parsonage, are due to his foresight and close personal interest in the work so near to his heart, and in deep and sincere regret that his resignation as secretary should be necessitated by uncertain health, we express our lasting gratitude and appreciation."



Grave of Samuel and Lily Brittingham, Boroondara Cemetery, 22.03.14

He continued to attend meetings as Trustee until just before his death, on 10 November 1944, at the age of 84. He was buried in Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery. John C Woodhouse was elected as Trustee in his place in 1945.

I acknowledge the assistance and encouragement of Alan Holgate, Mary Lewis and Rod Gilbert in the preparation of this article. Main source: Minutes of the Trustees of Auburn Methodist Church 1923 – 1952.

Alan K Chuck

125th Anniversary Event

Date	Event
<p>Open Day to celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the Auburn Uniting Church in Oxley Road: Saturday 13 September 2014 10-4pm (last admission to Tower 3:45pm)</p>	<p>Organised by: Friends of the Auburn Tower Inc. The Church, Tower, Hall and Eileen Pawsey Room will be open. Other heritage-listed properties on Hepburn Hill will be on a self-guided walking tour (most exterior only, but Robert Cochrane Kindergarten and Augustine Centre may allow interior access at certain times). Patrons may purchase walking guides at AUC. Other attractions will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mugs and publications for sale • Refreshments in the Pawsey Room • Icon Schools display in Church/Hall

Vale Max O'Connor

The Reverend Dr Thomas Maxwell (Max) O'Connor, a founding member of the Friends, died on 8 April after a long illness, in his 91st year. Max had been admitted to hospital in December 2013, but, in his inimitable style, announced that he was not ready to die at Christmas, but would stay around until Easter. This he very nearly did, succumbing on 8 April, the same day as his beloved wife Kath eight years ago. Their six children, numerous grandchildren and a large congregation farewelled Max on 15 April. After the funeral at Auburn, the cortege left for Franklinford cemetery, where Max was interred with Kath, close to their rural retreat at Yandoit.

2014 Concert Season

The first concert for the year was held on Sunday 30 March. Brian Krahnert, former organist and choir director, was there and has kindly supplied the following review.

A Wonderful Day Like Today ...

The Maroondah Singers have a long and distinguished history of choral music-making in Melbourne and beyond – 46 years in fact. In this concert, selected and directed by Lyn Henshall, a most varied programme was designed to cover the 125 years of the present Auburn Uniting Church building, which is being celebrated throughout this year. The audience was delighted to share the lighter and most tuneful repertoire from the end of the 19th Century, and covering the two world wars, together with selections from the musicals of more recent times, many of which were well within the living memory of those present.

Associate artists were Michael Petruccelli, a most promising young tenor on the threshold of a professional career in the world of opera and oratorio; and John Atwell, one of Australia's most distinguished organists, who accompanied with sensitivity and close rapport with the choir, as well as providing two splendid organ solos, including the Prelude to a Te Deum by Charpentier. The organ sounded with clarity of registration and meticulous articulation. Michael gave a most polished performance of music selected from his extensive repertoire of operatic arias – always controlled, with disciplined intonation and sensitive interpretation.

As always, the Maroondah Singers provided a wide range of musical styles with music that had wide appeal to the very appreciative audience, and with evidence of careful preparation. Not many choirs are able to present a programme in excess of an hour's duration entirely from memory. But the hard work involved more than repays the effort. The choir is able to look directly at the conductor, and give total concentration that results in an inspiring performance and the complete involvement of the audience. *Brian E Krahnert*

A Walk in Boroondara Cemetery

Guided by Boroondara Cemetery volunteers, Frances and David, a small group of Friends of the Auburn Tower visited the cemetery on an early autumn afternoon on Saturday March 22 2014. The tour was one of the activities planned in 2014 as part of the 125th Anniversary of the Auburn Uniting Church complex. The focus of the tour was visiting the grave sites of people with established connections to the church complex as well as other hidden gems located within the closed walls of the cemetery.

The gravesites visited with connections to the Auburn Uniting Church Complex included Mrs Valetta Beale mother of the late Hampton Beale, an inaugural member of the Friends; Mr Brittingham (Architect and Trustee); Mr Forsyth (Trustee and Soldier); Mr Peter Johns (Founder and his wife Charlotte who laid one of the Foundation Stones); Mr Thomas Vasey and other members of his family (Founder) and Mr Whitehead (Trustee).

The cemetery has had 75,000 burials since 1859 and interred in the grounds are some prominent Melburnians. Among the gravesites are a number of outstanding memorials including the Springthorpe memorial, the Syme family memorial, the Cussen mausoleum which recently featured in the ABC series of Miss Fisher's Mysteries. One of the more poignant memorials is the bronze statue of a dog guarding the tomb of his master. While the statue is cast in metal the sculptor beautifully captured the mournful look on the dog's face as it rests its head on its front paws waiting for its master to return, thus telling a story of extreme sadness.

Boroondara General Cemetery is one of the oldest cemeteries in Victoria and listed as a heritage place on the Victorian Heritage Register. The cemetery is often referred to as the Kew Cemetery and the 31 acre site has many features including a surrounding brick ornamental brick wall (1895-6), cast iron entrance gates (1899) and an original 1860 cottage with a later addition of a clock tower. The overall design of the cemetery was influenced by the Victorian garden cemetery movement. Another striking feature of the cemetery is the notable collection of mature trees including rows of Bhutan Cypress; Italian Cypress; Bunya Bunya; Weeping Elms; Canary Island Pine; Queensland Kauri and Weeping Cypress (Source: <http://www.kewcemetery.com.au/>)

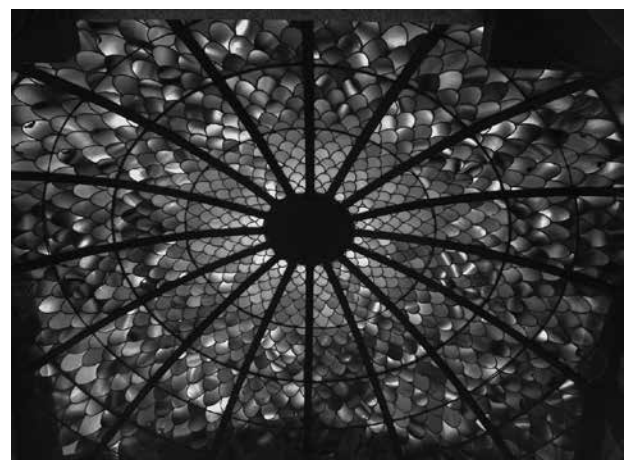
At one stage of the tour the party had refreshments in the rotunda located towards the eastern end of the cemetery. It was a most worthy and interesting afternoon. *Elizabeth Bethune*

Insert: Photos from the Walk in Boroondara Cemetery

Items from this Newsletter may be reproduced with due acknowledgement

A pictorial record of the Walk in Boroondara Cemetery

with thanks to Elizabeth Bethune



Clockwise from top left:
Beale family grave;
The visitors listen intently;
Afternoon tea in the Rotunda;
Spectacular ceiling of the Springthorpe memorial;
Forsyth family grave

Note: If anybody would like full colour versions of these pictures (the ceiling is spectacular) please contact Executive officer on 98191899 or execofficer@auburntowerfriends.org.au