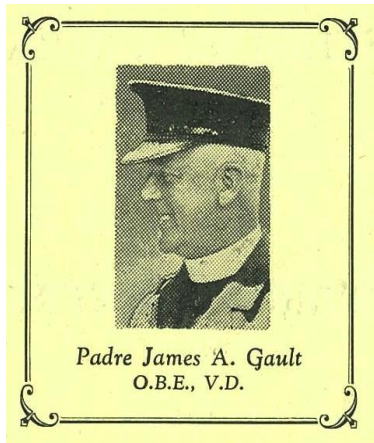


## A Stained Glass Window with an extraordinary Camberwell Connection

I would like to tell you a story, provide a history lesson, and leave you with a good feeling, and perhaps a smidgen of hope for the future.

At the heart of the story is a man named Padre James Archibald Gault (pictured twice at left below), and a woman, Louisa Gibbs (pictured at right, below).



### In the beginning...

Early in September this year, I came down to the Church Office to chat with Ian and Carolyn about the possibility of doing an article for Kairos on the family background and history (if there was any) on the stained glass windows in this Church building.

They were supportive of the idea, however they said that as a result of water damage in the office sometime in the past, most valuable historical Church documents had been boxed up and sent for safe storage at the Uniting Church's Archive Office.

There are currently 8 windows commemorating individuals, and only one had a name that I could recall a connection with (The Derrick family). So my starting point was to take a photograph of each of the windows, and go away and think about how and where to start researching.

And sometimes God works in mysterious ways, I am sure of it.

Because imagine my surprise when, less than 3 days after our conversation, before I had a chance to do anything, Carolyn forwarded me an email received in the Church Office, which she thought I might be interested in, and might reply.

### The email exchanges...

The email was from a Louisa Gibbs, and she wrote, in part:

*"Dear Sir / Madam,  
I hope you may be able to help with a request about my family's history.*

*My great-grandfather was Padre James Archibald Gault. I understand that in 1938 a stained glass window was erected in his memory in your church, when it was Camberwell Methodist Church.*

*I have only just learned of it and am hoping that it may still be there."* And she attached a link to the newspaper article where she found out about the window.

Well, I have to say I was just so excited to receive this, and I did reply to Louisa, saying that the stained glass window is indeed still intact in our Church (and is the fourth from the front on the right as you enter the Church). I passed on a photo of the window to her, and said that whilst at this point we had no other information to give her, I would be working hard to see what we could find out,...because

Louisa concluded her email by saying:

*"We currently live overseas in Senegal in West Africa, but when we are in Melbourne, we are part of the Fairfield Uniting Church congregation. If the window is still there, we would like to show the window to our children on our next trip to Melbourne at Christmas time.*

*Grateful for any information you may have.*

*Kind regards and thank you for your help.*

*Louisa Gibbs"*

 *The Plot thickens...*

How exciting is that. Louisa subsequently replied in some detail to my email, saying how *"very pleased (she was) with the great news that the stained glass window erected in the memory of James Gault is still intact! My parents and brother were really interested to hear this news too. It is so lovely to have found that the window is still there.*

*The reason I came across the 1938 newspaper article was because earlier this year I was doing a bit of research into Padre Gault. In Senegal there is only a small Australian expat community (about 40 of us). For the first time, we held an ANZAC day ceremony in the capital Dakar to commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli Landings. During the ceremony I read an excerpt from Padre Gault's book, written during World War 1. My dad actually wrote an article about our little ceremony for his local car club, which was spotted by a friend in the RSL and lo and behold it eventually appeared in the Centenary of ANZAC edition of the Victorian RSL magazine (June 2015)! I will come back to this later.*

*Most of what I know about Padre Gault relates to his wartime service. He first embarked as a Methodist chaplain on 16 July 1915. He stayed in Europe until a year after the war, assisting with the repatriation of the troops.*

*He leaves as a legacy his book: Padre Gault's Book of Stunts, which contains encouraging stories and reflections to keep up the spirits of the troops. There is an original of it in the war memorial and our family has a copy.*

*We still have the OBE mentioned in the panel of the window, as well as a portrait of him in his Army Uniform.*

*He was married to Edith and had 3 children; Hugh, Jean and Margaret. Hugh was my maternal grandfather.*

*I believe he worked in a number of parishes, but I am not sure exactly what his connection to Camberwell Methodist was. My mother wonders if he may have been a parishoner there after retirement. Perhaps in time the church archives will be able to shed some light on that.*

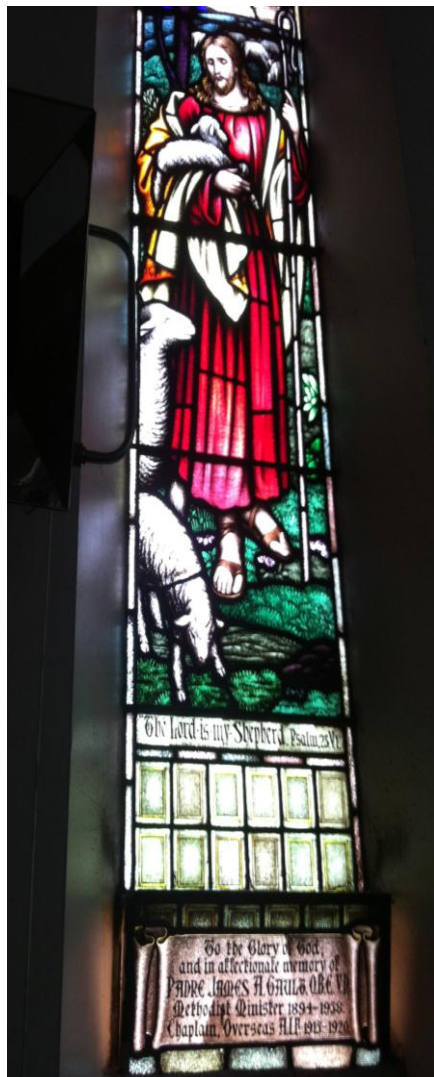
*If you don't mind, I will get in touch again when we are in Melbourne, as we really would enjoy the opportunity to see the window. Thanks again for the photos and your email.*

### The Article about the stained glass window

The article which initially caught Louisa's attention was in The Argus on Monday 5 December 1938, under the heading "Padre Gault Memorial". It reads...

*In memory of the Rev. James A Gault, one of the best-known Australian military padres, a stained glass window was unveiled at the morning service in the Camberwell Methodist Church yesterday by the Methodist chaplain-general the Rev T. C. Rentoul.*

*The Rev Mr Rentoul said that Padre Gault had been a faithful minister of the Gospel. He had been a father in God to many throughout the Methodist circuits, a friend and padre to our many soldiers of the AIF and AMF an uncriticising lover of his brethren in his ministry, and a tender husband in his home. He would long be remembered by the living and when they died the window would be a memorial to his work."*



### The bottom line .....

However, what Louisa perhaps accidentally omitted to mention or overlooked was the last line of this article, which concluded with the words:

*A memorial baptismal font was also dedicated by the Rev. A. H. Mitchell.*

And what do you know, to the right of the altar is our beautiful baptismal font, with an inscription that faces us each time we attend Church which reads, "In loving memory of Padre James Gault, OBE, VD, 4/12/1938." This might be a further surprise for our visitors.



One small point I should clarify at this stage. Besides the OBE, you will have noted that the Padre also has been awarded the somewhat dubiously titled VD award. This, you will be pleased to know, is not a reference to a medical condition but is the Volunteer Officer Decoration, a crown honour made to auxiliary army officers of the British Empire between 1894 and 1931.

#### *Anzac Day in Senegal*

I subsequently read the article written by Louisa's father (which is really good) and it states that Louisa is working as Special Counsel for the law firm Geni and Kebe, and her husband is the National Director of Word Vision for Senegal. A copy of the article is posted in the narthex.

#### *Not the end.....*

And there the story might have ended, except that in the course of researching the Padre, I found some special references which I would like to share with you.

#### *Crosslight Magazine, April and May 2015*

One of my early searches for a reference to Padre Gault produced a link to a letter to the editor of Crosslight in May 2015, sent by a Louise Joy.



For some unknown reason, it appears that I missed reading the April 2015 Crosslight. In this edition, the executive editor, Penny Mulvey, wrote a feature article titled "Chaplains Church and Gallipoli" which covered a number of themes, including the loss of so many young men in World War 1 (including her great uncle), but more particularly the role of church leaders, both at home and the chaplains in the field.

The article drew on the extensive research of Australian Historian Dr Michael McKernan, who wrote his PhD on Australian Churches during the World War 1. Dr McKernan believed the Churches abandoned Christianity when war was declared, and embraced a civil and sectarian religion.

Dr McKernan observed that it was the few most famous of the Chaplains of World War 1 such as William McKenzie (of the Salvation Army), Andrew Gillison (minister at St George's Presbyterian Church in East St Kilda), Gerard Tucker (who established the Brotherhood of St Laurence post-war & who is a relative of Fiona Ensor) and James Gault, who saw a vision of Christianity which would work post-war in Australia, if only the churches listened. Sadly, he concluded that the churches resisted the insights of these chaplains who walked and talked with the soldiers, and as a result they failed the nation completely.

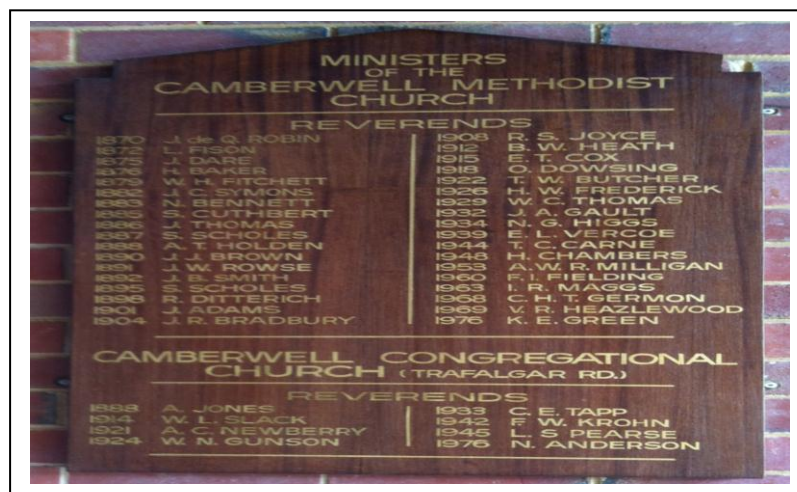
However, it was the reference in Crosslight to James Gault which prompted Louise Joy to write "Thank you for another excellent edition of *Crosslight*. My great uncle was Padre James Gault, mentioned on p.14 of the Feature article on Rev. Andrew Gillison & was known for "Padre Gault's Stunt Book", .....greatly enjoyed by soldiers."

Louise signed off her letter - *Louise Joy (by name of Gault until 1961)*. I have since worked out that Louisa is in fact the grand-daughter of Dr Edward Gault, brother of Padre James, and who would be a second cousin once removed of Louisa Gibbs.

#### *The Padre's Working Life (in brief)*

Padre Gault was a Methodist Minister from 1894 – 1938. As mentioned earlier, Padre Gault first embarked overseas as a Methodist chaplain in 1915. At this point he was 50 years old, and it was his life experience that helped him support and comfort the young boys so far from home, and going through hell. He stayed in Europe after the war, assisting with the repatriation of the troops, and remained chaplain of the Overseas AIF until 1920.

In his lifetime he had charge of churches in Tasmania (Hobart, South Launceston, Burnie), the St Kilda circuit, the Collingwood mission, the Seymour training camp, Brunswick, Port Melbourne, Malvern, Yarra Street Church in Geelong, and finally Camberwell, where we record his presence in a third place, on the list of Methodist Ministers of the Camberwell Methodist Church at the entrance to the Church (in 1932).



After 40 years in the Methodist ministry, Padre Gault retired due to ill health in April 1934, aged nearly 70, and left to undertake relieving work in Mentone. He died on 1 February 1938, and was cremated at the Springvale Crematorium. The window was unveiled on Sunday 4 December 1938.

#### The UCA Archives Office

As mentioned earlier, following water damage to property due to a storm some years ago, some items of historical importance and value were sent from Camberwell Church to the Uniting Church Archives Office for storage and safe keeping.

Since September this year I have been in touch with the Archives Office several times, seeking any information they had relating to Padre Gault or the Stained Glass Window, as it was quite an event in its day and attracted several press reports.

As late as 23 November I was formerly advised by the UCA archivist that *"I have retrieved our boxes of records relating to the Camberwell Methodist Church and have been unable to find any mention of the stained glass window. I have read through the Trustees Minutes and looked at all the published histories/anniversary booklets etc. but no joy, I'm afraid."*

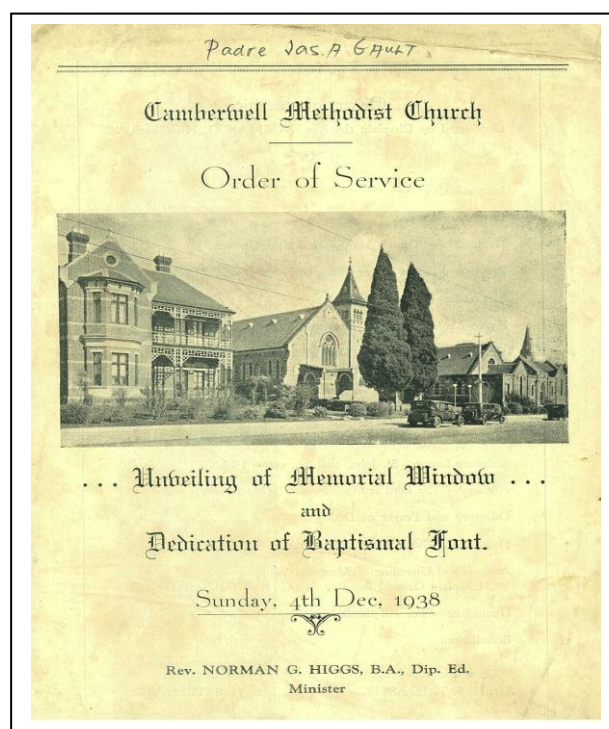
A bit of a blow. So all attempts had proved fruitless, and, as in the intervening period the Archives Office had relocated all its material to a new facility, despite their best efforts, it appeared that this line of enquiry was exhausted.

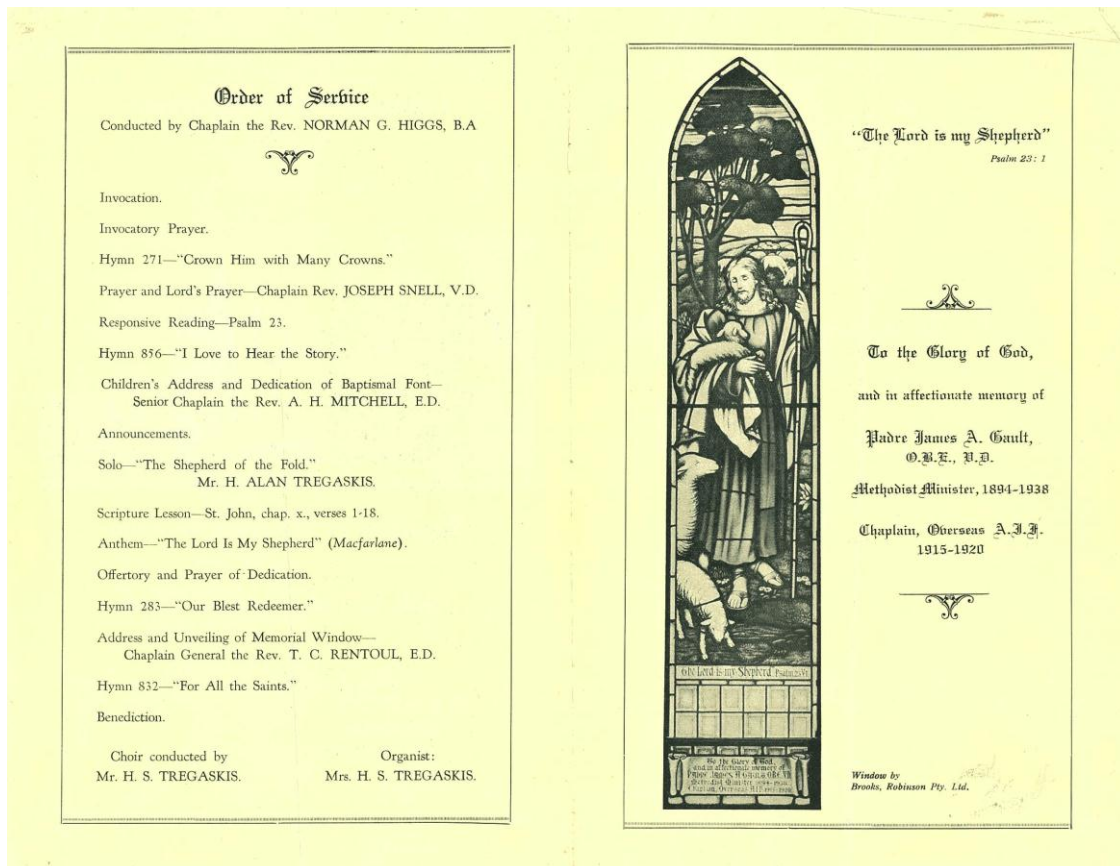
But at least we still had the window, and a wealth of information on the Padre's life and works.

#### It's never over until.....

Four days after the search was over, the indomitable Jennifer Bars, UCA Synod Achivist extraordinaire, emailed me saying, in a very understated way, *"Hello Stuart, I have found a couple of items relating to Padre Gault: an order of service for the unveiling of the memorial window and the order of service for Padre Gault's memorial service". Bingo!!*

The Order of Service for the Unveiling of the memorial window is reproduced below.





### *The heart of the matter*

He may be long gone, but after nearly 75 years, it is wonderful to know that Padre Gault's memory and his legacy are being revived and commemorated by his family and beyond. And an extraordinary coincidence that these references have all emerged in the last year or so.

I am so pleased that we have been able to preserve not only the window and the font, but also the memory of a favourite and highly regarded Padre. The more I have found out about him, the more humbled I have been to review his achievements and pleased to help commemorate his life's work.

I hope we all the opportunity to welcome Louisa Gibbs and her family if and when they visit, and we can all acknowledge the life and work of a wonderful person.

It is a high note to finish the year.

PS. For anyone who wishes to read some material relating to the life and work of the Padre around Australia, I am happy to make available.

Stuart Ensor