

Memorial Windows of Camberwell Uniting (Methodist) Church

Reverend John W Rowse

Introduction

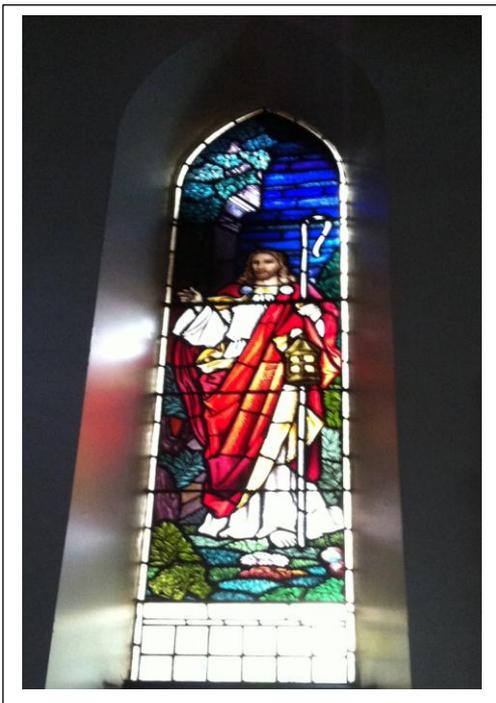
Does the name Reverend John Rowse resonate with you? Possibly not, given that he was part of the Hawthorn Circuit and was a minister at Camberwell Methodist Church for just over a year in 1891-2, somewhat before our time.



The following paragraphs provide some detail of the Reverend's life and work, for he was quite a significant voice in the Methodist church for more than half a century, but in a sense it is a story told in reverse, as it was at the time of his death and immediately afterwards that the full extent of his achievements and talents were noted and acknowledged.

The Reverend's life is immortalized in a stained glass window located at the very front right of the church as you enter. In fact if you sit on the right hand side of the centre aisle you might not even know it is there. On a Sunday morning, the Minister and the Choir are best placed to appreciate the beautiful image with its red, gold, white, blue and green colours.

The window depicts Jesus as the shepherd, with the accompanying text of "I am the light of the world." Most appropriate for such a memorial.



Dedication of the Memorial Window to the late Rev. John W. Rowse

On Saturday 5 June 1953, Rev. John Rowse died in a private hospital in Camberwell, aged 86 years.

On Sunday morning, August 15th 1954, according to *the Methodist Spectator*, “the beautiful Camberwell Church was filled for the dedication of a Memorial window to the late Reverend Rowse.

The service was conducted by the Rev. A. W. Milligan, and the window dedicated by the Rev. Harold Chambers, former minister of the Church.

Mr Chambers said. “This morning we have dedicated a memorial to one of the great and gifted ministers of the Church, the late Rev. J. W. Rowse. The inscription on the window reads: *“To the glory of God and in affectionate memory of Rev. J.W. Rowse, born 1867, died 1953. Minister of this Church 1891. President of Conference 1930. A tribute of love from Elizabeth his wife.”*

Why our Church?

Mr Chambers continued: “The theme of the window is Holman Hunt’s famous picture ‘The Light of the World’. It is very fitting indeed that such a memorial should be in this Church, for it was to this Church, and the Parsonage adjoining, that Mr Rowse brought his bride, this being their first ‘married’ appointment.” But more of this later.

John Rowse the person

I have been only able to ascertain that the Rev. Rowse was born sometime in 1867.

He actually began preaching at the age of 15 in Bendigo (yes, you read correctly, 15 years old), and was popularly known as “the boy preacher” in the Bendigo district.

Discerning eyes detected even then in the lad the promise which was eventually fulfilled. Accepted as a candidate for the ministry in 1886, he was ordained in 1890. On 2 April 1891, he married Miss Elizabeth Taylor, daughter of Mr and Mrs James Taylor, well known citizens of Bendigo.

According to the Minutes of the 1954 Conference Minutes, Rev. Rowse formally began his Ministry in 1886 at Boort, “He subsequently received appointments to a number of our leading churches, in all of which he was deeply respected for his strength of character and for the high quality of his work. A fearless debater, he was always sure of his facts, and presented a case that was generally unassailable. He was known throughout the State for his courageous attacks on the social evils of the times, and he also espoused the cause of Church union.

To the younger ministers who were fortunate enough to come under his direct influence he was a source of encouragement and a true friend in the discussion of their problems. Clear and logical in his thinking, sound in his judgments, tender and sympathetic in his dealings with those in whose sorrows and troubles he shared, he represented the Church on all public occasions with a dignity and bearing that made us proud of him as our leader.

The gracious ministry he exercised in all the circuits had the charming, effective and complete support of his wife, so that they both won a high place in the esteem and affection of their people.

Indefatigable as a pastor, and a true friend indeed, the Rev. John W. Rowse was a great gift of God to the Methodist Church. The abiding nature of his work and the shining quality of his character are his lasting memorial amongst us.”

His Working Life

Most of Rev Rowse's ministry was spent in Victoria, but he spent one term as superintendent of the important Patterson Street, Launceston, circuit.

After serving in sixteen circuits, he became a supernumerary from the Kew circuit in 1934. This did not end his active career however, for he then took charge of churches in the Malvern circuit. He remained a beloved pastor in all the churches he served in over the course of fifty years as a preacher.

He was Chairman of a District on two occasions, and his merit was recognised by the Church in 1930 when he was called to the Presidential Chair. When he became a supernumerary in 1934 he went to live in Gardiner/Glen Iris.

"In all his labours he was magnificently supported by his wife, and in the last ten years of his life, when weariness and pain kept company with him, to find his brave spirit unafraid and his calm faith and trust in God rising supreme above it all, she ministered to him in a manner that was a benediction."

Career Highlight

On Tuesday 9 December, 1930, the Launceston Examiner ran an article under the heading "*Rev. J. W. Rowse Enthusiastically Welcomed President of Methodist Conference.*" *The article went on to say:*

"Four and a half years ago Rev. J. W. Rowse was farewelled from the Launceston Methodist Circuit. Last evening he was greeted as president of the Victoria and Tasmania Methodist Conference, the highest office to which a Methodist minister can attain, save that of president-general.

The president was greeted with prolonged applause when he rose to speak. He acknowledged the warm, courteous welcome to himself and his wife. When he left the city four years ago he did not dream that he would be president, and that he would be back on his presidential visit.

"No church is more catholic than the Methodist Church," said Mr. Rowse. "Methodists are Protestants: they are evangelical, and missionary. The phrase, 'Friends of all, enemies of none,' is typical of the spirit of Methodism. The members of other churches are our friends. The things we have in common with them are far greater than the things which divide."

He paid a tribute to the early churchmen in Launceston, and quoted Ralph Waldo who said: "When worship decays, all things go to pieces." Churches were an evidence that man lived not by bread alone. They gave the impulse to worship. The Methodist Church was grappling in a splendid way today with the masses of the people in great cities.

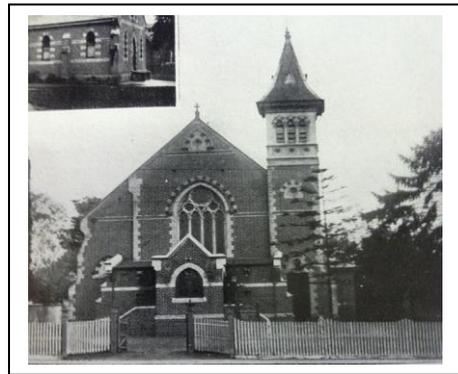
Mrs. Rowse was presented with a beautiful basket of pink and mauve carnations. She graciously responded, and being prevailed upon to address the gathering, spoke most enthusiastically of her pleasant experience during her Tasmanian visit and the scenic beauties of the island. She reminded the company of the vast amount of work being done for the circuit by the women. "In fact," said Mrs. Rowse, "the church cannot do without them."

The president concluded by reference to the quality and value of the Methodist hymnology."

Historical Footnote

On 26 April 1890, the Superintendent of the Hawthorn Circuit urged the necessity of erecting a parsonage to accommodate a married minister. So heavy was the liability which the Trustees of the church had already incurred that they were reluctant to increase the debt at that time.

Just over a year later however, they accepted the burden (of additional debt) and a parsonage was built at a cost of £1,399. The first occupant of the parsonage was the Reverend J W Rowse. (*excerpt from "The Story of the Camberwell Methodist Church and Sunday School 1871 – 1921."*)



Original photo of parsonage for married Minister, Camberwell Methodist Church, taken in 1891. It complements the original church façade, with the separate Sunday School (inset).

Whilst the above picture highlights an impressive building, it is even more so when taken in the context of the photos below, which show Burke Rd Gardiner, looking towards Camberwell, 1905, or its later equivalent, taken just above the Gardiner station, in 1911.



Personal Milestones

Rev. Rowse, born in 1867, married Elizabeth Taylor (known as Lizzie), second daughter of James Taylor, late of Sandhurst, on the 2nd April 1891.

On 2 April 1951, "The Age" newspaper reported that the "Rev. John W. Rowse and Mrs. Rowse, of Kyarra Road, Gardiner, announce with gratitude the 60th anniversary of their wedding, celebrated at Armadale on April 2, 1891.

Mr. Rowse, who is a celebrated minister of the Methodist Church of Victoria and Tasmania, began to preach at the age of 15, when he was known as the "Boy Preacher." He was

ordained in 1890, and occupied many of the principal pulpits before he retired in 1934."

The couple received congratulations from the King, the Governor General, the State Governor, the Premier of Victoria, the Member for Glen Iris, and many, many friends.

The following photo was then featured in *"The Age"* newspaper on Tuesday 3 April 1951. I think it is really touching. They were obviously a devoted couple. It is the only photo of the Reverend I could find, (he is on the right), and by this time his health does seem to be failing.



Finale

On Monday 8 June, 1953, *'The Age'* reported the death on 6 June 1953 of the Rev. John William Rowse, aged 86 years. *"Greatly loved husband of Elizabeth. Peace, perfect peace"*.

On Tuesday 9 June, 1953, *'The Age'* reported that the Rev. J. W. Rowse, who died at the weekend, formally *"entered the ministry in 1886. In the period up to 1934 he was minister at Stawell, Ballarat, Maldon, Windsor, Alphington, Malvern, Prahran, Launceston, Geelong West and Kew. Mr. Rowse was known to his congregations as a fine preacher and to fellow ministers as an able administrator and a forthright debater."*

"Much sympathy is felt for his gracious wife who survives him, and who graced his ministry with unique dignity."

Prior to his cremation at Springvale, a service was held in the Camberwell Church. It was appropriate that the memorial service should be held in the Camberwell Church, for it was here that Mr and Mrs Rowse began their married life.

Following his funeral on Monday, 8 June 1953, the late Rev. Rowse was cremated at Springvale Cemetery, and rests in the Melaleuca Garden, rose 20.

Elizabeth Rowse died on 18 November 1957. She was cremated at Springvale Cemetery and her ashes scattered.

A Final Tribute

At the window dedication, Mr Chambers spoke on the meaning and message of Holman Hunt's great picture, which sets our Lord forth as Prophet, Priest and King.

At the conclusion of the dedication, and after applying the message of the window personally to the congregation, the Reverend Chambers finished by saying:

“A copy of this great picture is burnt into the glass of that window as a permanent memorial of one who faithfully and successfully proved himself to be an ambassador of the divine Prophet, Priest and King; a window which adds beauty to this Church and must ever prove to be an uplift and inspiration to the succeeding generations who will look upon it and read the name of the minister of God therein memorialized, and the name of his gracious partner in Life and service whose love has placed it there.”

Such a moving finish. The window is an almost hidden gem. I hope you take a moment next time you attend Church to look and reflect on a memorial to a fine Christian who dedicated his life to the Church and its people, and admire a couple who were devoted to each other for the whole of their lives together.

Acknowledgements

1. Information regarding the window commemorating the life and work of Rev Rowse both in the Camberwell Methodist Church historical documents and in the public domain is very scant. I am grateful to the archivist and a couple of the researchers at UCA Archives who directed me after some fruitless searching to the precious preserved historical copies of the Methodist Spectator Newspaper, which filled in many gaps around when the window was installed and why Elizabeth chose our Church ahead of others in which to erect a memorial.
2. For the comments quoted from the 1954 Methodist Conference Minutes, I am grateful for the loan of material provided to Rev Ian Brown written by David Street. In 2009, David commenced writing a draft of what was to be a book entitled “*The Church near the Junction.*” Sadly I understand that David died before completing his book, however the work he had put together began with the early Ministers of the Camberwell Methodist Church, including, fortuitously, Reverend John Rowse.
3. The early photographs of Burke Road were on the top of a pile of material being consolidated in the UCA Archives Office as a result of the closure of St Andrews Uniting Church on the corner of Malvern and Burke Roads, and just happened to be placed next to the box of papers I had ordered for research. A camera in a phone is a wondrous thing.