



THE HISTORY OF THE BRETHREN MOVEMENT V1 - 26.04.21

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The Christian Community Churches of Australia is a Christian Brethren movement. Those who call themselves Christian Brethren (also known as Christian Brethren or Open Brethren) trace their heritage back to a movement in Britain in the early 1800s. The genesis of the Brethren is the story of a number of prominent people, whose thoughts and actions solidified in the formation of a number of major centres of Brethren activity, including Plymouth, over a number of years from the early 1820s to the late 1840s. At that time there was no label, no definition, nor any sign that would suggest the early days would bear the fruit we see now. The Brethren arose out of "an Evangelical movement of spiritual renewal which began in Dublin and South-West of England around 1827-1831 (hence the term 'Plymouth Brethren'), and which has as one of its main concerns the realisation of a fellowship in which all true believers in Christ might find a welcome."¹

Movements never just happen; they are conceived because of a confluence of circumstances and they take shape within an environment that provides the right conditions for their growth. It was from a seedbed of apostasy and sectarianism, revival, and a deep desire for unity, that the Brethren movement began and quickly grew across Britain and the World.

From the separation of the Church of England from Rome by Henry VIII in 1534 there had been only one recognised church in England, the Church of England, which received its position, strength, and power from its establishment by the state. While the Brethren movement was essentially born out of a reaction to the perceived apostasy of the Church of England, this is only part of the story. Prior to the beginning of the Brethren movement, England had been host to at least three former renewal movements. The first, the Puritans, aimed to purge the Church of

¹ Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 3.

England of anything Roman Catholic. The second, the Quaker movement, was a "mystical experience in which one could come directly to God."² Quakers were given to zealous missionary and social endeavours. The third renewal movement became known as the Methodist revival, led by John Wesley. Aspects which contributed to this revival were the development of a more enthusiastic preaching event, the use of hymns, the development of Bible study groups, and extempore teaching. The Methodists also embraced a theology of individual rather than church-based salvation that stressed "justification by faith through an instantaneous experience of regeneration...."³. All of these elements of renewal played a part in the formation of the Brethren.

Now to the more obvious contributor to the environment leading to the Brethren movement, the state of the Church of England. At the turn of the 19th century the Church of England was still the only official church in England. While separatism in Britain was on the rise, all other religious formations were viewed by the official church as 'irreligious'. But those who had been affected by renewal in any way had no real choice of an alternative expression of Christian community. They could leave the 'official' church and be labelled as apostates or remain within an institutionalised church that was in a deplorable state. As the numbers of those touched by the renewal movement grew, they were compelled by their need for authentic church to form new faith communities. "Dissenting churches were on the whole, more flexible, and were beginning to throb with the new spiritual life..."⁴.

Thus, began the Brethren movement. It was not a unique or original movement, but a product of the ingredients of past movements and reactions to the surrounding ecclesial environment of the day. The movement carries with it shades of Puritanism with its insistence on the authority of the Bible, of the Quaker movement with its zeal for mission and service, and of Methodism with its emphasis on biblical preaching and its desire for purity. Many aspects of the movement were also shaped through their reaction to the Anglican clergy/laity division, its structure, its apostasy, and its lack of evangelism.

It was within this environment of personal faith and a desire for ecclesial simplicity that the Brethren movement took root and grew in the hearts of those who believed that God and Scripture called them to something other. In response the Brethren chose a path that valued: unity of all, the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, holy living, plurality of leadership, and a life of service and mission.

² Earle Edwin Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., and expanded (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 381.

³ Cairns, 386.

⁴ Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren* (Vancouver: The University Press, 1967), 3.

The Brethren Heritage

Though originating in Dublin, the first recognised congregation was formed in Plymouth (1831). The beginnings were essentially informal, with many showing a desire to return to the simplicity of apostolic days and to break down the walls that divided Christians.



Edward Cronin, medical student at Trinity College, Dublin, withdrew from church attendance for a time because he was refused Communion, unless he was prepared to enter into membership with one of the dissenting churches. This he regarded as a denial that "the church of God was one, and that all that believed were members of that one Body." Joined by a small group of like-minded people, he met with them "for breaking of bread and prayer" in a private house. Others equally disenchanted with existing ecclesiastical conditions soon associated with them, including Anthony Norris Groves, John Vesey Parnell (Lord Congleton), John Gifford Bellett, and John Nelson Darby. Their studies confirmed their belief that they could observe the Lord's Supper without an ordained clergyman. They 'broke bread' simply, recognising that the Lord, who was present, would guide them by His Spirit as to audible participation in the gathering.



Edward Cronin



Anthony Norris Groves

John Vesey Parnell

John Gifford Bellett

John Nelson Darby

The established church had become to a large extent a class symbol. It represented the higher classes of society. One aligned oneself with the established church in order to move up in society. Against this church culture, the Brethren movement refused state money and systems of raising money such as pew rents, preferring to trust God for all provisions. Their desire to serve and reach others went largely unmatched and became a defining mark of the early Brethren.

Although these early expressions of the movement were referred to as 'The Brethren', they did not call themselves 'Brethren churches'. They viewed 'The Church' as being composed of all believers in Jesus Christ. So, instead of referring to their local gatherings as a 'church', they used the term 'assembly', reflecting their ethos that they were simply an autonomous localised 'assembly' of followers of Christ. Many started referring to the movement as 'The Assemblies'. Because of the central tenet that the church is not an institution or a building, but rather 'people' who follow Jesus, they eschewed referring to the buildings they met in as churches, instead calling them Gospel Halls or Chapels.



A foundational Brethren congregation was the assembly at Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, which had as its joint-pastors the Scottish Hebraist Henry Craik (1805–1866) and the German-born George Müller (1805–1898), best known for the orphanage which he established in that city in 1836 and which survives for over one hundred years. Whilst the orphanage has ceased to exist,

the George Muller Charitable Trust continues to provide support to orphans and others in need. (Dr T. J. Barnardo was also a member of the Brethren when he founded his equally famous orphanage in London in 1870.)



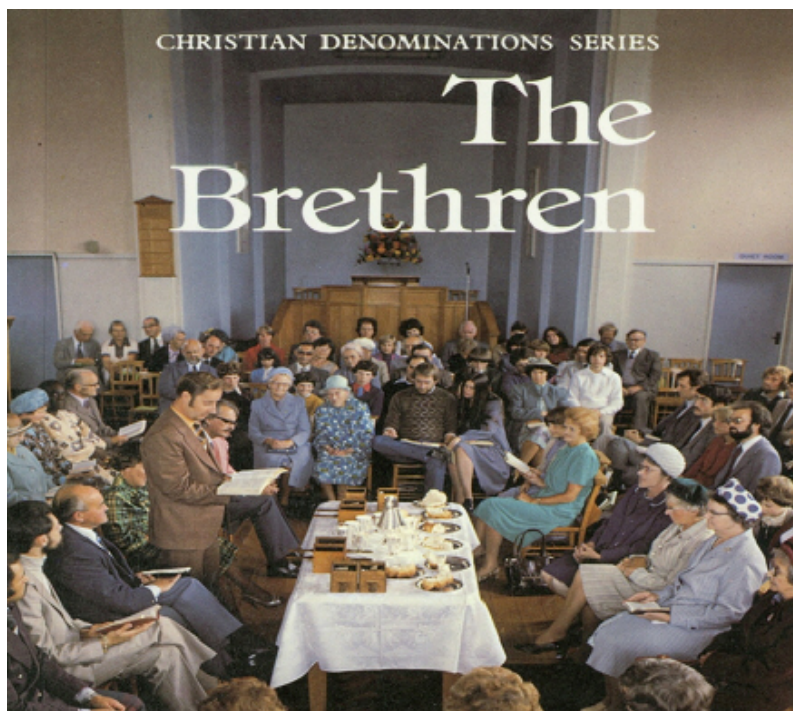
Henry Craik



George Muller

Unity of all

With the church at large splintering in all directions due to the apostasy of the established church, the Brethren, influenced initially by Groves, sought to find a place where the unity of Christ could be expressed in a non-sectarian way. The early Brethren felt that the basis for unity must be first found in Christ and yet also made visible in the unity of believers. They based their praxis for local gatherings on Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them." For the Brethren, this verse was the context of communion, which was viewed as the



outward symbol of union with Christ and simultaneously as the visible symbol of the unity of the church. For this reason, it was important to the early Brethren that the Lord's Supper be open to all Christian believers irrespective of their particular point of view on doctrine. The communion event was viewed as oneness at work. For the Brethren, unity was paramount, and the acceptance of all became one of the most attractive attributes of the movement.

Authority of Scripture

The desire of the movement from the beginning was to find a new freedom away from history and tradition. "The Brethren sought to effect a fresh start without authority, precedent, or guidance beyond the letter of Holy Scripture."⁵ With the breaking away from history and tradition there arose a strong commitment to *sola scriptura* where Scripture became "not merely the supreme authority, but the sole authority"⁶ for faith and practice. Knowledge of Scripture and Bible-based preaching became hallmark strengths of the early Brethren.



⁵ William Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 3.

⁶ Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, 84.

Priesthood of All Believers

The axiom underlying this principle is that God gifts all believers, and all should therefore be free to exercise those gifts to benefit the church body. George Müller was convinced, after exhaustive study of the New Testament, that “there should be no dichotomy between clergy and ordinary members of the congregation. Instead, Müller believed in the priesthood of all believers and the freedom of all church members to speak what God had placed in their hearts.”⁷ With their rejection of any formal structure and the embrace of the concept of the priesthood of all believers, the clergy-laity dichotomy was replaced. Harris states, “The Church itself is God’s clergy.” He continues, by stating that it is the presence of God’s Spirit that constitutes the Church; and His gift to any individual alone qualifies them to serve in the Church.⁸ The removal of the clergy was replaced by the involvement and service of the entire believing congregation,⁹ as the priesthood of all believers.

Holy Living

From their perspective, the Brethren were caught between the apostasy of the institutional church and the unattainable ideal of sinlessness. Their solution to this paradox was to encourage believers to continually and proactively separate from evil and pursue a life of imitation of Christ. For Groves, “imitation was the means to God’s blessing, in personal as well as ecclesial piety – imitating Jesus was the basis for Christian devotedness ... and imitating apostolic practice was the basis for godly Christian ministry.”¹⁰ Holiness was viewed as an individual’s visible spirituality expressed in belief, separation from evil, and personal and ecclesial obedience.

Plurality of Leaders

Due to the rejection of a clergy class, there was no practice of appointing pastors in the churches and the earliest gatherings of the Brethren were conducted with no apparent consideration of formal leadership.¹¹ Anything seen as pertaining to the establishment of order was originally considered as standing against the work of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, some like Müller and Craik functioned as pastors alongside a group of elders. “This meant that a group of elders shared leadership...; Müller and Craik did not lead by themselves....¹² In this vein Groves states, “For myself I would join no Church permanently that had not some constituted rule. I have seen enough of that plan, of everyone doing what is right in his own eyes, and then calling it the

⁷ Jonathan Yeager, ‘The Roots of Open Brethren Ecclesiology: A Discussion of the Nature of the Church Compared to the Ecclesiology of the Darbyite Brethren, 1825-1848’ (Regent College, 2006), 28.

⁸ Harris in Callahan, *Primitivist Piety*, 56–57.

⁹ Callahan, 58.

¹⁰ Groves in Callahan, 163.

¹¹ Callahan, 52.

¹² Yeager, ‘The Roots of Open Brethren Ecclesiology: A Discussion of the Nature of the Church Compared to the Ecclesiology of the Darbyite Brethren, 1825-1848’, 100.

Spirit's order, to feel assured it is a delusion."¹³ Müller and Craik themselves, "After a two-week retreat to consider church order (February 1839) ... concluded that the church should be governed by a plurality of elders."¹⁴ Governance through plurality of leaders became the norm for the Brethren.

Service & Mission

The Brethren rejection of the established church also resulted in their rejection of the established missionary societies. This thrust them into a mission by faith position, which gave them more missional freedom than their counterparts. Individuals and couples who felt they were called by God to overseas mission were commissioned and sent out by local assemblies, relying on God to provide for all their needs. This may account for the quick spread of the movement into many nations, to the point that the movement is now well established in 128 countries and territories.¹⁵

From the outset the principle of sacrificial living and of living to serve others was wholly embraced and practiced among the Brethren. The Brethren soon became a movement of the people for the people, including the poor and oppressed. Members considered that it was their duty to give up much to meet the needs of the poor in the name of Christ. They "renounced the possessions, pleasures and status of the world."¹⁶ As Groves stated, "It was the duty of every one to give up all for Christ absolutely and unreservedly."¹⁷ This attitude is exemplified in the life of Groves, who spent much of his life on the mission field, and by the work of Müller among children and orphans in poverty.

The Exclusive Brethren

Unfortunately, after a severe disagreement with some of the leaders of the movement regarding the inclusion of all believers, J. N. Darby, one of the most prominent founders of the movement, pressed for division. Those who followed him broke off all relations with the other foundational congregations. From that time the Brethren became two distinct groups, with the mainstream of the movement maintaining its original principles and identifying as the 'Christian' or 'Open' Brethren, while the Darbyist group became increasingly centralised in government and separatist in relation to other Christians, and soon became known as the 'Exclusive Brethren'. The Exclusive Brethren have also adopted and registered the name 'Plymouth Brethren Christian Church' both globally and in Australia.

¹³ Anthony Norris Groves and Harriet Baynes Groves, *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves: Compiled Chiefly from His Journals and Letters; to Which Is Added a Supplement, Containing Recollections of Miss Paget, and Accounts of Missionary Work in India, Etc.* (London: James Nisbet, 1869), 420.

¹⁴ Joseph M. Vogl and John H. Fish, eds., *Understanding the Church: The Biblical Ideal for the 21st Century* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), 28.

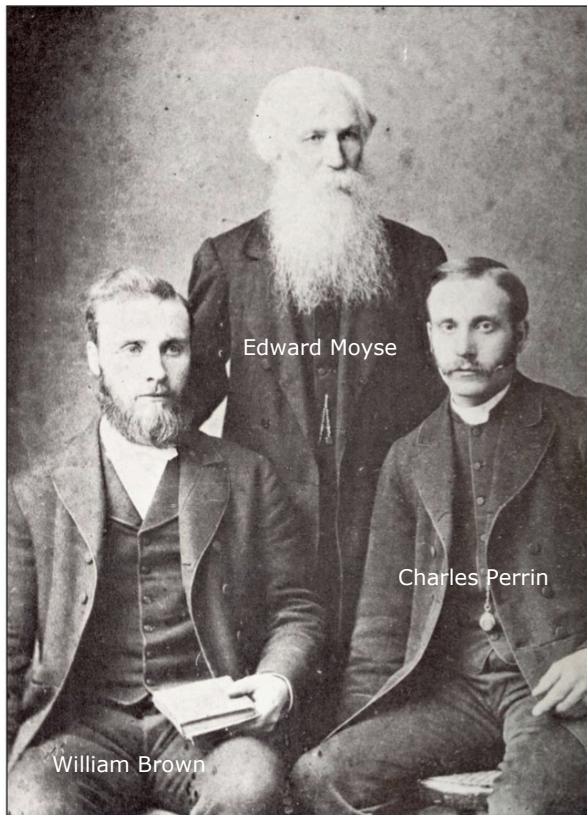
¹⁵ Ken Newton, ed., *The Brethren Movement Worldwide*, 4th ed. (Lockerbie: Opal Trust, 2015), xxiv.

¹⁶ Tim Dowley, ed., *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 452.

¹⁷ Groves and Groves, *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves*, 18.

The History of the Brethren Movement in Australian

The Beginnings



The “Brethren” appeared throughout Australia around 1858 gained momentum as a result of the efforts of the immigrant English evangelists of the 1859 revival, including William Brown, Walter Douglas, George Grove, John Hambleton, Rice Hopkins, Thomas Manders, Harrison Ord, Charles Perrin, and Henry Varley. This was around the time that the Brethren evangelists Donald Ross and Alexander Marshall emigrated to Canada, and Gordon Forlong and Charles Hinman to New Zealand. These men preached to large congregations, won converts and established local assemblies in halls built for the purpose. Transport was difficult over Australia’s vast distances, so they operated in fixed localities. Strong groups of assemblies in these areas, such as the north coast of Tasmania where assemblies Brown, Perrin and

Moyses conducted campaigns, persist to this day. The first conference of these newly emerged assemblies took place in that Northern Tasmania in 1873, although it was some time before they started identifying as “Brethren”.

George Grove¹⁸

One of the most significant pioneer English “Brethren” missionaries was George Grove, a renowned tent evangelist and church planter.

Grove, who was born in London in 1845, and his brother William, received Christ in 1861 under the preaching of Richard Weaver. He commenced evangelism immediately by chalking texts on the pavement of the busy Old Kent Road. Soon after, he preached in the open air “in fear and trembling” from Isaiah, chapter 55, moving the crowd by his tearful appreciation of a full and free salvation. Losing, then recovering, his voice, he joined “Brethren” at Surrey Chapel in South London, preaching in the building and outside it, under the guidance of Newman Hall. In 1875

¹⁸ Summary from references in works by Peter Lineham, *There We Found Brethren: A History of Assemblies of Brethren in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Gospel Publishing Society, 1977); Alex Monro, *Assembly Testimony in Qld 1876–1976* (Brisbane: Published privately, 1976); Kenneth John Newton, “A History of the Brethren in Australia with Particular Reference to the Open Brethren” (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990); Hy. Pickering, *Chief Men among the Brethren*.

he commenced full-time in evangelism in the eastern counties, traveling by means of a Bible carriage, and was based in Devonshire. He visited Canada and the U.S.A. After his return to England he became concerned about the need in Australia and emigrated in 1885.

The Grove family took up residence in Melbourne, traveling to Tasmania and Queensland, and conducting campaigns from a Gospel tent. Victorian assemblies at Ballarat, Brunswick, Protestant Hall in the CBD, Collingwood, Footscray and St. Kilda, all commenced during the 1880s, and Queensland assemblies at Bundaberg, Clayfield, Ipswich, South Brisbane, Toowoomba and Wynnum from 1880 to the turn of the century. Grove contributed to the development of many of these church plants. Frank Bates, Fred Woods and others who became Gospel carriage workers and evangelists found Christ under his preaching in Queensland. Grove journeyed "from one end to the other" of the eastern colonies, establishing assemblies and strengthening those he found.

Grove reconciled factions created by the more restrictive ecclesiastical teaching of Rice Hopkins, with whom he had worked in England, and Hopkins' brother-in-law Richard Graham, who visited Australia from England for evangelism in 1887–93. The main differences lay in the necessity of baptism prior to Christian fellowship, the extent to which a worker could become involved with other denominations, and the need for meetings of elders across all assemblies in a city. "Brethren" assemblies grew more by converts than by transfers or natural increase in those days, and most of the evangelists were intent on building rather than dividing.

In 1891, as did many others of his contemporaries, Grove toured New Zealand.

Grove suffered a collapse while preaching in a tent near Ipswich and died in 1910.

The Expansion of the Movement

John Hambleton¹⁹

John Hambleton, who was born in Liverpool in 1820, resisted the teaching of a godly mother, and spent years in America and Australia as an unsuccessful gold miner and as an actor and adventurer. He became a Christian on his own in California in 1857, after one of many narrow escapes from death, and returned to England to seek his family. He found his sisters, and, after learning the more about his new found faith, began to preach in the open air, on racecourses

¹⁹ Summary from references in works by David J. Beattie, *Brethren: The Story of a Great Recovery* (Kilmarnock: John Ritchie, n.d.); F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); Alan Dyer, *God was Their Rock* (Sheffield: Pioneer Publishers, 1974); M. H. Saxby, *Sounding Out: A Record of Gospel Effort at Home and Abroad by Australian Assemblies* (Chatswood: Australian Missionary Tidings, 1973); Alex Monro, *Assembly Testimony in Qld 1876–1976*; Kenneth John Newton, "A History of the Brethren in Australia;" Hy. Pickering, *Chief Men among the Brethren*; and "Australian Missionary Tidings" (Sydney, 1910–1964).

and in fairgrounds and later in hired halls, in the Midlands and elsewhere, for the next thirty years. Recently converted Rice Hopkins preached with him in Liverpool in 1862. Thomas Barnardo of children's homes fame found Christ under his ministry in that year. Hambleton emerged as one of a leading group of outstanding "Brethren" evangelists of the 1859 revival, along with Harry Moorhouse, whom he introduced to evangelism, and Richard Weaver.

The "Bible Carriage" Ministry in Australia

Hambleton returned to Australia in 1879, together with another "Brethren" evangelist, Frank Brewster. Possibly because of his experience as a traveling actor in the United States, he considered that the future of pioneer evangelism in the colonies lay with "Bible carriage" work. He brought a prototype built in Bristol with him to Australia after a visit to England in 1884. Hambleton arranged for the building of another carriage in Australia, and John Baird, one of his protégés, who began some years earlier on foot with a bag of books on his shoulder, commenced an Australia-wide ministry of 47 years under the name "Australian Bible Carriage." Such carriages, later called "Bible vans," were at that time horse-drawn, and their slow speed, maintenance, and the dangers from 'frightened' horses added to the evangelists' challenges and adventures. The first motorized van did not appear until about 1912. George Müller of Bristol provided financially for the literature which the evangelists distributed, and they sent reports to "Brethren" journals in the United Kingdom.

Hambleton used a Bible carriage which displayed prominent Bible texts for evangelism in northern Tasmania, and is thought to have encouraged Frank Bond to engage in a similar work. He helped in local "Brethren" conferences as a Bible teacher. He found increasing difficulties with colonial prosperity and the holiday mood of the people. It was a time when educators in Victoria had reacted strongly against ecclesiastical pressures to teach Scripture in schools, and he noted that "the Bible has been shut out." He engaged in preaching and teaching throughout Australia for his last ten years, teaching God's Word in the emerging assemblies and living in Geelong until his death in 1889.

Harrison Ord²⁰

Harrison Ord was another member of the wave of emigrant evangelists following the 1859 revival in the United Kingdom. Born in Yorkshire in 1833, he received training as an engineer. He became a Christian under the preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon at a great rally at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall in 1857. Immediately he forsook his trade and began to work as an evangelist. The recently converted Rice Hopkins preached with him on Clapton Common in 1863. Ord used his mechanical ability to make a model of the Tabernacle, and taught from it,

²⁰ Summary from references in works by David J. Beattie, *Brethren*; Peter Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*; Kenneth John Newton, "A History of the Brethren in Australia;" Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*, ed. William F. Knapp, 2 vols. (Denver: W. F. Knapp, 1936); Hy. Pickering, *Chief Men among the Brethren*.

developing his expository skills. He participated in the building of assemblies at Glasgow and Eastbourne. Though he possessed a powerful physique, after a long campaign in a tent pitched in the main square in Bath, he lost his voice and was unable to continue public preaching. His wife also died around this time. Commended from Wellbeck Hall in London in 1876, he sailed with his eldest daughter for the colonies of Australia, and during the long sea voyage his voice began to recover.

Brethren assemblies arranged a three-month evangelistic campaign for Ord in the Assembly Hall in Melbourne, which he filled consistently. His strong voice fully recovered; he held the final meetings at Wilson's Circus with thousands present. He supported Henry Varley's crusade in the Melbourne Town Hall. He preached in Launceston and Hobart in Tasmania. Attending a conference at Table Cape, he taught "Brethren" ecclesiology, consolidating the assemblies in their distinctive identity. The first such conference in Australia was held at Wynnum in 1873, with Charles Perrin and others speaking, setting the tradition for the annual north coast meetings which continued for a hundred years.

Ord visited New Zealand in 1877–78, preaching at Dunedin, Christchurch, Nelson, and Auckland. The campaign in Dunedin included addresses at the "Sailors' Rest" at Port Chalmers, a forerunner of the later "Everyman's Huts," which many well-known evangelists including Henry Varley also visited. Ord returned to Australia, but revisited England in 1880, preaching in various counties and also in Ireland, where he found his second wife. He settled in Melbourne, giving hospitality to Hopkins and his family on their arrival in 1882. Other evangelists who made Victoria their home included Samuel Carter, George Grove, John Hambleton, Henry Rainey, and Henry Varley. Others, like Samuel Carter who conducted Gospel campaigns in Bendigo and Ballarat in 1881 with about sixty baptisms following, worked out of Sydney. The railways made the developing nation accessible to evangelists. Two-thirds of Australia's population resided in the cities by 1890. Tracks from Melbourne to Wodonga opened in 1876 and from Sydney to Albury in 1881. Four thousand miles of rail existed in that year, and more than eleven thousand by the turn of the century. Evangelists working in main city centers had no difficulty in reaching them, but country areas required the use of Gospel carriages for many more years.

Ord visited New Zealand again in 1898–99, finding the South Canterbury region a fruitful field. After further work in Victoria, Tasmania, and New Zealand, he moved to Geelong. Thomas Manders, an Irish evangelist who came to Australia in 1876 and preached in all colonies over many years, and who was another church planter and builder like George Grove, had built a brick Gospel Hall in Geelong in the early 1880s. Manders also established the first permanent assembly in the west in 1901, at Fremantle. Ord served locally in Geelong until his death in 1907.

Henry Varley²¹

Born in 1836 of a godly mother in Lincolnshire, Henry Varley went to work as an errand boy at the age of thirteen in London, where he became a Christian in 1851 while learning the trade of a butcher. He received a tract in Trafalgar Square, found the giver to be a cousin, and accepted an invitation to a meal. They went that evening to hear the Baptist preacher Noel, and Varley trusted in Christ at that meeting. Immediately he began to help with Noel's work, and was baptized by Noel the following year.

Varley engaged in the meat trade at Notting Hill and conducted meetings for his fellows in that industry with immediate success in numbers and response. He sailed for Australia soon after, sought gold unsuccessfully, and worked as a butcher in Geelong. He returned to England in 1857, setting up business for himself in London. There he married the daughter of his one-time employer, a union which continued happily for forty-five years. He continued preaching, and crowds flocked to hear him, such that the meetings moved to the 1,600-seat West London Tabernacle in 1860. Criticized for forming an independent congregation, he replied that his converts might not feel at home elsewhere.

So many invitations to preach arrived that in 1868 Varley decided to devote himself to full time evangelistic ministry. After successful campaigns in England, he sailed for meetings to Canada and the United States of America. He preached to 20,000 people in the Boston Hippodrome of the circus entrepreneur, P. T. Barnum, impressing the owner greatly.

Varley preached fearlessly the prime evangelical doctrines of the integrity of God's Word, the all-sufficiency of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the unity of the church which is Christ's body, the expectation of His return, and the necessity of spiritual rebirth as the only answer to the social evils on every hand. Frances Ridley Havergal came to faith through reading his *Trust in the Living Faith*. Dwight Lyman Moody in 1872 responded to his challenge to full surrender, and thereafter engaged in full time ministry. Gypsy Smith's father became a Christian under his preaching. He was an associate of Henry Moorhouse. He preached at the invitation of Charles Haddon Spurgeon to five thousand in his Metropolitan Tabernacle. Returning to Canada, he experienced "a blaze of revival."

In 1877 Varley came again to Australia, preaching in the Melbourne Town Hall. The following year he preached at Dunedin, Nelson, and Wellington in New Zealand alongside other evangelists and with some notable converts. Back in Tasmania for a rest, he was soon preaching again, and

²¹ Summary from references in works by David J. Beattie, *Brethren*; Alan Dyer, *God was Their Rock*; George H. Fromow, *B. W. Newton and Dr. S. P. Tregelles* (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, n.d.); Peter Lineham, *There We Found Brethren*; Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*; Hy. Pickering, *Chief Men among the Brethren*. Other standard histories make no mention of him, possibly because his main "Brethren" involvement was in the colonies.

brought to Launceston and Hobart Tasmania's a great awakening.



He revisited to England, and in 1880 he and others preached in a tent in Wiltshire, and they formed the converts into the Swindon "Open Brethren" assembly. In 1883 he helped in the formative years of the Archway assembly in London. After 1888 he made Melbourne his base. He denounced social evils in his 1891 *Social Wickedness in Melbourne*.

Varley continued to visit England occasionally, preaching at an "Open Brethren" conference at Glasgow in 1901. While at Brighton in 1912 and planning a return visit to the same convention, he died of asthma, a lifelong disability. At his memorial service, he was described fittingly in these terms: "A long life of true, heroic service for God."

Cooperation and Separation

Brethren evangelists usually worked together, but some of them believed that the only way to keep converts safe was to raise barriers between them and other professing Christian groups. They did this by teaching the necessity of baptism prior to Christian fellowship, restricting the extent to which a worker could become involved with other denominations, and emphasizing the need for meetings of elders across all assemblies in a city. Others opposed these notions, leading to a polarisation between leaders who upheld either an "Open" or a "Needed Truth" basis for gathering. The best known of the restrictive groups was associated with Rice Hopkins after 1883, but it returned to "Open" ranks in 1961. Evangelists in both factions actively opposed community wrongs, e.g. in Varley's 1891 tract "Social Evils in Melbourne." Most upheld pre-tribulation rapture futurism.

“Exclusive” Meetings

“Exclusive” meetings of the type which attempted to maintain a testimony to the visible unity of the body of Christ after the “Bethesda” division of 1847 appeared in Australia in the 1870s following visits by John Nelson Darby and others, but grew mainly by immigration, proselytisation, and natural increase. The main divisions, Kelly 1881, Stuart and Grant 1885, Lowe 1890, and Glanton 1906, generally confused them, and alliances were often on the basis of the teacher who arrived first and advocated for his factional doctrine. A general reunion of these various exclusive assemblies has occurred in recent years.

A Heretical Sect (Exclusive Brethren)

Further development and changes among the “Exclusives” resulting from the Apollinarian and Sabellian² teachings of the two James Taylors in 1929 and 1936 and gave rise to a sect which is notorious in the Australian community for its ruthless destruction of the home and family life of any who turn from them. Evangelism ceased in 1961 with the great upheavals of that year. The Exclusives eventually registered the name “Plymouth Brethren Christian Church” in Australia and use this as an alternate identifier, possibly to distance themselves from the notoriety associated with the “Exclusive Brethren” name. The Exclusive Brethren have no relationship with or connection to the Open/Christian Brethren in Australia.

Missions, Outreach and Evangelism

George Müller visited Australia three times in 1886–88, preaching to large interdenominational crowds in most major cities and in many lesser centers, in which, by this time, two-thirds of the population of Australia lived. From this time on Brethren assemblies involved themselves in all sorts of worthwhile interdenominational evangelical activity, supplying leaders and workers out of proportion to “Brethren” numbers. It is noteworthy that Bill Newman, the best-known evangelist in Australia, came from a “Christian Brethren” congregation.

At the same time, the stream of overseas missionaries in the tradition of Anthony Norris Groves continued, as it does to this day. This work has been overseen since 1910 by Australia’s best-known “Brethren” institution, “Australian Missionary Tidings” now known simply as “AMT”.

As Brethren assemblies became more established in Australia the movement’s growth largely centered around children and camping ministries. Many churches were planted by first establishing Sunday Schools in the growth corridors of cities and towns. Families were reached through their children and new assemblies established.

Also, through the combined efforts of Brethren assemblies in various states many campsites were purchased and developed, mostly under the umbrella of Christian Youth Camps (CYC). Over the years these camps have seen thousands of young people reached and they continue today to provide opportunity for outreach and ministry.

Christian Community Churches in Australia

In the early 2000's a group of people in positions of leadership within the Christian Brethren movement around Australia met to discuss opportunities for Brethren churches to work together across State borders. At a national conference held in Victoria in June 2008 open to all members of Christian Brethren churches those present agreed to the formation of a national network of churches. Subsequently, in June 2010 in Queensland at a second national conference, steps were taken to formalise a name for the network as *Christian Community Churches of Australia* (CCCAust). The composition of the network now includes representatives from Christian Brethren churches from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia as well as representatives of para church groups associated with the Christian Brethren movement in Australia.