
A People's Church in a Distant Land: Commencing the Church of England in South Australia, 1836–43

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ABSTRACT

Members of the Church of England were committed to establishing an outpost of their denomination in the proposed colony of South Australia. They were aided by the provision in the South Australia Act which mandated the appointment of a salaried Colonial Chaplain. Preparations were made and the congregation began life aboard the *Buffalo* when the Reverend Charles Beaumont Howard went aboard in July 1836. The strengths these people collectively brought would be challenged by the conditions that faced them as they settled in the colony. There was a strand of hostility to the Church of England, often expressed in the press. More pressing was the search for shelter to permit regular Sunday worship. The trustees borrowed heavily to erect the building which still stands on North Terrace, Adelaide, but economic downturn nearly brought disaster. Soon Howard was conducting regular services from the *Book of Common Prayer*. The arrival of additional clergy aided the expansion of the Church of England in the colony, and even the untoward death of Howard in 1843 aged 37 could not halt the consolidation of this outpost of the Church of England in a distant land.

This article has been peer reviewed.

Introduction

This essay addresses the formation of the first Church of England (Anglican as we would now say) congregation in South Australia, one which has survived to this day, namely Trinity Church, Adelaide. How did the established Church of England rise to the challenge of forming an extension of itself in this new colony in a distant land? What were the tasks? How were they addressed? What success did this exercise in the planting of a church across the seas achieve? In this tale of church planting in its earliest years

from 1836 to 1843, the main character is the Reverend (Revd) Charles Beaumont Howard, the first incumbent. However the story is not just about him; it is also about the people who worshipped with him on Sundays and joined with him in the life of the congregation, as well as those who simply made use of his public role as Colonial Chaplain to conduct marriages, baptisms and burials. The story has a prehistory in London, and then a short opening element on HMS *Buffalo* when the congregation first came

together. This was followed by the struggle to get the church established in the colony, which concluded with Howard's death in 1843. I have illustrated this essay mainly with images of still-extant historical items in the possession of Trinity Church and displayed there.¹

Planning in England-, 1834–1836

What resources, both physical and otherwise, such as ways of life and thought, relationships and expectations, were available to equip this new congregation? First, money: supporters of the Church of England who wished to promote the establishment of their church in the proposed colony knew very well that there would be little or no funding from the British government. The *South Australia Act 1834*, provided for the creation of the Province of South Australia.² While there would be a government-appointed governor and a local administration answerable to the Colonial Office, funds would be raised and supplied by the Colonization Commission. The Commission would sell land entitlements to investors. The funds would pay for the transport of labourers and artisans (preferably with their families), to South Australia. There were no provisions in the Act addressing the creation and management of such social institutions as schools, churches, hospitals or anything else. Such action was left to the intending settlers and their supporters in England. They were expected to establish the necessary voluntary societies and raise such funds as they saw fit. This model of social action had been well practised for perhaps two generations, most notably in the founding of missionary societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society in the 1790s, along with societies campaigning for the abolition of slavery, and many other social causes.³

Therefore, if members of the Church of England wished to set up congregations in South Australia, they would have to proceed down this well-trodden voluntary society route. Consequently, those interested in promoting the Church of England in the colony founded the South Australian Church Society in January 1834. They published a manifesto declaring the intention to raise funds to support the promotion of the Church of England in South Australia. The key assertion in the manifesto was that:

In a society to which, not men and women merely, but *society* (sic) shall be transplanted, there will be religion, which is an attribute of society, [which will] take immediate root, and exert all its happy social influence.⁴

Furthermore, the successful establishment of the Church of England in the colony would, the manifesto claimed, 'sustain ... the doctrine and discipline of that church which is established in the mother country; and tend to make the colonists ... her most faithful and affectionate allies'.⁵ In this statement they were drawing attention to the importance of creating religious institutions to sustain and encourage the new society. This was the core attitude informing the efforts of these church planters in London. Donations of money would be essential, along with a whole series of other necessary arrangements.

With planning for the colony proceeding, the promoters of the South Australian Church Committee reported in June 1836 on the establishment of a management committee, the appointment of the Revd C.B. Howard, M.A. as Colonial Chaplain, and the successful raising of a sum in excess of £800. They confidently framed their endeavours as founding the South Australian Church. For them, 'Church' meant Church of England without any acknowledgement that at least one other Christian group, the Congregationalists, was likewise seeking to do the same.

Significantly, the largest donations, both of £200, were from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). These two long-established missionary societies were the principal agents by which members of the Church of England in overseas British colonies and territories were assisted. They had a lot of experience in church planting, especially recently in the West Indies. Another critical contribution came from Pascoe St Leger Grenfell, a London merchant with West Country links. He gave the entitlement to an acre (0.4 ha) of town land and forty acres (16 ha) of country land. These he had purchased in the land sales in London conducted by the South Australian Colonization Commissioners, in their campaign to raise funds to pay the passages of workers to the colony, following the concepts first outlined by Edward Gibbon Wakefield in his 1829 pamphlet *A Letter from Sydney*.

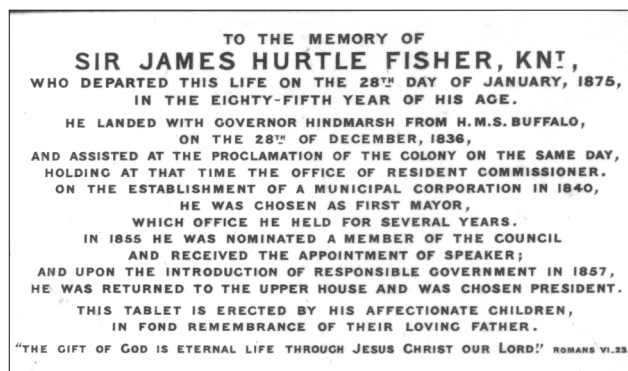
The Church Society committee further decided that as there was now real property as well as funds to be managed, then responsible persons would have to be appointed to do this. Since the new church was not itself a legal entity, a trust was needed, which would have this legal capacity. By a series of legal arrangements,

eventually three local trustees were able to register a deed of trust with the newly created Supreme Court of South Australia in mid-1837.

The terms of the trust are important and reflect the experience of the SPG and the SPCK in church planting. Behind that lay the Church of England's Canons of 1604 which offered a template that assisted in the drafting of the trust deed. As these experienced churchmen and lawyers were well aware, these canons (or rules of the church), among many other matters, specified the church officials (called churchwardens) that each parish should have and required them to care for the church fabric. It also specified the necessity for annual meetings, called vestry meetings, where they could be held to account.⁶ The trustees were therefore charged to erect 'a church where Divine Service could be celebrated according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England'. It was expected they would manage church income from pew rents, in effect the annual membership subscriptions from those who were regular attenders and able to pay. Based on Trinity Church records of the 1840s, these settled at one pound annually (five shillings a quarter) for a single seat, and perhaps three pounds annually for a family-sized pew. A sixth of the sittings were to be free of such charges for those unable to pay or who would have official reason to attend, such as the military. This all drew on the provisions of new churches established, especially in London, in the 1820s without any ancient endowment. Then followed a list of tasks upon which the trustees might expend funds: the church fabric, employment of a schoolteacher, supplies, support for the minister, and so on.

In appointing the South Australian trustees, the management committee of the SA Church Society in London looked to the men appointed to hold public office in the colony. The men they chose were James Hurtle Fisher, the Resident Commissioner in South Australia for the Colonization Commission, Osmond Gilles, Colonial Treasurer, and Charles Mann, Advocate General. Fisher, in particular, remained associated with the church he helped establish on North Terrace until his death. He had been brought up by his clerical grandfather, the Revd Henry Knapp. That Anglican religious formation stayed with him all his life. The other two trustees had much less influence on the new church.

Next, the provision in the *South Australia Act 1834* for the appointment of a salaried Colonial



Memorial to J.H. Fisher in Trinity Church Adelaide
(Photo: Don Gee)

Chaplain should be considered.⁷ After two other nominations fell through, the Revd Charles Beaumont Howard was appointed on the recommendation of Bishop John Bird Sumner of Chester (later Archbishop of Canterbury). After much discussion the planners of the colony, dominated by Dissenters, had accepted that this salaried post for a clergyman of the Church of England was not sufficient reason to throw the whole endeavour over, even if the idea of a paid official of the established Church of England being part of the fabric of the new colony was objectionable to many of them.⁸

The Church of England members of the group of colony promoters, such as Raikes Currie, had no such compunctions. They were part of the church that had existed in various forms for hundreds of years — what Jeremy Morris has called 'a people's church' — an identity shared by adherents of the Church of England in its thousands of parishes. It meant going to church on Sundays to attend services: Morning and Evening Prayer, and usually, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a monthly Communion service, all from the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. This was 'church', part of the life of every town or village community, however diverse in social status and experience they might be. People went to church because they were part of English society, which worshipped together on Sundays.⁹

Alongside this shared identity as members of the Church of England there were other Christian bodies outside the established church. These churches derived from groups who had separated from the Church of England in previous centuries and hence were often called Dissenters or Nonconformists. These included Baptists, independents now calling themselves Congregationalists, English Presbyterians,

Quakers, and the more recently emerging Methodists arising from the ministry of John and Charles Wesley. All these groups had been subject to a range of legal restrictions, whose members if they did not conform to the Church of England by attending its services and receiving communion once a year, were excluded from a range of public offices, the franchise, and access to the ancient universities. While various remissions had been introduced during the eighteenth century, it was not until the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 that these concerns were fully addressed. The Roman Catholics were likewise becoming more visible, after nearly two hundred and fifty years of repression and legal restraint, as the remaining laws against Roman Catholicism were removed in 1829, conferring on them similar rights to those granted the Dissenters the previous year. This legislation was called Catholic Emancipation. As a result, the capacity to vote in particular supercharged the public ambitions of both groups. Catholics transformed the political landscape of Ireland. The Dissenters' campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England became vociferous, especially during and after the general election of 1832, when a reforming 'Whig' or liberal government under Lord Grey came to power. Their claims included removing its control of the Church by the state, stripping the Church of accumulated privileges and endowments, abolishing the compulsory tithe or local church tax, and placing all denominations on the same footing. Dissenting churches were growing fast and now formed a substantial proportion of regular churchgoers, especially in the new industrial cities, as would be revealed by the 1851 English census, which recorded church attendance. They were brimming with confidence. That was apparent among the planners of the colony of South Australia. It informed the self-awareness of many of those who migrated to South Australia.¹⁰



The Reverend Charles Beaumont Howard, wax medallion portrait, possibly by 'Parker' (Art Gallery of South Australia)

Charles Beaumont Howard (born in Dublin in 1807) (Fig. 3) was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, who had prepared for ordination. After two curacies as a deacon in Ireland, he came to England in 1832 as work dried up in Ireland following the major legal changes to the Church of Ireland passed in London that year.¹¹ Bishop Sumner, appointed bishop of Chester in 1828, became Howard's patron. He was a significant public figure in the 1830s. He sat on the major Royal Commission into the Poor Laws, and published a substantial work of political economy which argued for the importance of non-government social agency in the life of society. He was a leader among the Evangelicals in the Church of England. He priested Howard at Durham Cathedral on 29 July 1832, and then appointed him to be curate of Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, 29 July 1832 to April 1835, then to two posts in the diocese of Chester. Howard held strong evangelical convictions. Supported by subscribers, he published a series of sermons in 1834. These sermons are infused with the core evangelical emphases on the need to turn away from sin based on the death of Christ, and be converted to a life in obedience to him, and active in a life of service.



Stained-glass window displayed in the vestry at Trinity Church Adelaide (Image provided by Trinity Church)

Howard married Grace Montgomery Neville who, like him, came from St Peter's Parish in Dublin, in April 1832. They had four daughters when they went aboard the *Buffalo* in mid-July 1836. Howard was always said to be affable and an easy mixer, helped by his fiddle. As he told the planning committee when interviewed for appointment, he preferred the security of a government salary as Colonial Chaplain to the uncertainty of an income dependent on the offerings from his congregation.¹²

Along with Howard and all that he brought in person and outlook, a number of physical resources were also shipped to the colony to support this church planting project. Aboard

one of the ships travelling to the colony was a clock purchased by the Church Committee from an eminent London clockmaker. It was to be displayed on the church tower and serve as the town's clock. There was also a modest stained-glass window (Fig. 4), now much damaged. It celebrated the year (1836), the sovereign (King William IV), and displayed symbols of a shared English identity. It was to be installed in the new Adelaide church as a visual reminder of the bonds of union this new church would have with its mother church in England. It is displayed to this day. There is no image of the prefabricated church that was purchased in London because it was poorly packed and did not survive the journey. This damage was made worse by its treatment on the mudflats at Port Adelaide before being hauled by Howard and Gilles to Adelaide.

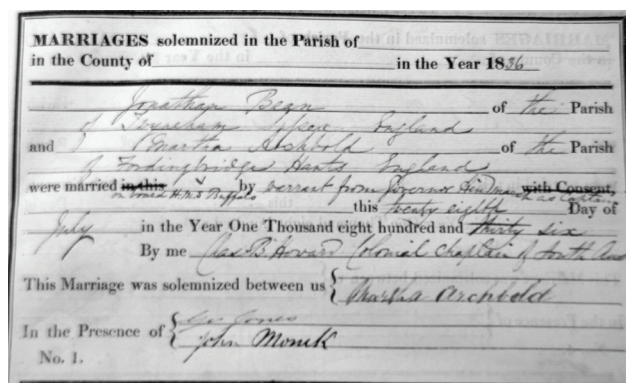
Chaplain Howard's ministry aboard HMS *Buffalo*, July–December 1836

Howard brought with him onto the *Buffalo* a box of Bibles and copies of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer supplied by the SPCK for the use of his congregation. Howard may have used one of these volumes on the ship when he conducted Morning Prayer on Sundays, subject to the weather and Captain Hindmarsh's ill manners. But for Howard that was not all. He is recorded as repairing on Sunday evenings to fellowship with the Wesleyans:

Every Sunday when the weather would permit we had the Church service, and a beautiful sight it was to see the immigrants and ship's company joining together in this service ... The Rev CB Howard, the chaplain, would often come below and join with the Wesleyans and others in their evening service.¹³

One of those Bibles and also a copy of the Book of Common Prayer from that box survive. The Prayer Book is reliably endorsed as having been used by Howard on 28 December 1836 at the proclamation of the inauguration of the colony's government.

Howard also took on board a series of Registers (for marriages, baptisms and burials) that also survive, clearly embossed 'Trinity Church'. Howard chose this name for his church.¹⁴ The Marriage Register records three marriages conducted on 28 July 1836, while the *Buffalo* was only a few days out of Portsmouth struggling to catch a fair wind in the Channel. These marriages were between Jonathan Bean and Martha Archbold (Fig. 5), William Whittle



Trinity Church Marriage Register, Marriage no.1, 28 July 1836 (SLSA SRG 94/A2/2)

and Mary Ann Murray, and Thomas Nicholas and Mary Ann Richards. These three couples wanted the regular ordinances of their church to record their marriage, conducted by the clergyman, rather than the ship's captain, though Hindmarsh had to endorse the register.

Howard's ministry aboard the *Buffalo* was closely observed and sometimes obstructed. Aboard ship, George Stevenson wrote diary entries recording life during the journey.¹⁵ A Presbyterian, he acted as Hindmarsh's secretary in working on the future affairs of the colony. He was highly critical of Hindmarsh's conduct, notably toward Howard. Hindmarsh imposed his authority, seeming to delight in putting difficulties in the way of the conduct of services, or sometimes even refusing to permit them on what seemed to Stevenson to be flimsy excuses. Hindmarsh regarded himself as being a protégé of George Fife Angas, the strongly Baptist businessman who was the principal investor in the colony. Soon after he arrived, Hindmarsh wrote to Angas about the Church of England in the infant colony. He was very critical of Howard and his wife, and made some ill-informed assertions about the church trust, as well as about Howard's politics and his wife's appearance and clothing choices.¹⁶

Commencing the Church of England in the colony

When the official party aboard HMS *Buffalo* arrived in Holdfast Bay the time had come to put all those well laid plans for the Church of England into operation. The realities of the new colony would demand a flexible response. Howard participated in the proclamation ceremony at Glenelg on 28 January 1836, and on Sunday 1 January 1837 conducted Divine Service – Morning Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer

– along with a baptism. As David Hilliard wryly reports, ‘Among the congregation was Robert Gouger, the Colonial Secretary, who noted in his diary that Howard had preached “an excellent and impressive sermon” on the unpromising text (Luke 13:8) “Lord, let it alone this year also.”’¹⁷

These activities were not conducted in a vacuum. The other Christian groups also set about arranging Sunday services and the various supports that their members looked for. In England the Congregationalists had established a Colonial Missionary Society specifically for South Australia in 1835, raised funds, and appointed their first minister, Thomas Quinton Stow for work in the colony. He arrived in South Australia in October 1837. Supported by some leading colonists, he gathered like-minded people together on 19 December 1837 to form a church. In 1840 the Congregationalists opened a substantial chapel in Freeman Street (now Gawler Place). Through the 1840s the chapel’s membership grew, and by 1848, the congregation had paid off the debt on the building. By 1850, the Freeman Street chapel had 250 enrolled members.¹⁸

The Methodists, principally Wesleyans in these early years, were less structured in their beginnings. Their strong emphasis on lay initiative meant that their first service was held on Kangaroo Island on 13 November 1836 led by lay preachers. Similar gatherings were held in Adelaide in the subsequent months, and in May 1837 the first Wesleyan society was established. The chance arrival of a Wesleyan minister, William Longbottom, in August that year, led to the official recognition of the Adelaide Wesleyans by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in London. They proved to be the most vigorous of the Christian groups setting up in the colony. Methodists comprised ten per cent of the population in the 1844 census, a stronger base than in any other Australian colony. Their activism and commitment to evangelism soon saw their numbers grow to even higher levels later in the century.¹⁹

While a Presbyterian clergyman of the Church of Scotland (Robert Haining) did not arrive till November 1840, there were private gatherings of Presbyterians from 1837 and Ralph Drummond, a United Secession Church minister, arrived in 1839. Both he and Haining struggled for some years to gain viable congregations. Roman Catholics were a much smaller group in South Australia than in the eastern colonies, largely

because settler recruitment for South Australia was focussed on England. They had no resident priest until 1841.

Baptists formed a church of thirteen members in July 1838.²⁰ David McLaren, the colonial manager of the South Australian Company, acted as the pastor of the church. By the end of 1840 about sixty members were meeting for worship in a church building in Hindley Street that had been formerly used by the Wesleyan Methodists. In 1842, however, following McLaren’s return to Britain, the church divided over issues such as whether church membership was open to all believers or only to those who had undergone believer’s baptism by full immersion. Despite the best efforts in Britain of George Fife Angas, a suitable pastoral successor to McLaren was not found, and by the end of 1841 the church had splintered into several small groups. The strongest to emerge was Ebenezer Chapel in North Adelaide under the leadership of James Allen, a newspaper editor and owner, who like McLaren had previously received some theological training. He pastored the congregation in an unpaid capacity. Founded in 1842, it had about thirty members in 1843 when it became the first congregation to construct a building in South Australia specifically for the purposes of Baptist worship.²¹ However it was not until 1861 that the Baptists could appoint their first minister and commence building their first large church, in Flinders Street Adelaide.²²

This then was the religious context in which the Church of England people were to set up their first congregation. It had quickly become a scene of open and vigorous activity by all the denominations represented in the United Kingdom, operating in unfettered if friendly competition for members. Now what of the challenges that these Church of England people now faced in the colony? How would they fare?

While there was nominal episcopal oversight from the bishop of Australia, Bishop William Grant Broughton lived in Sydney and had churches scattered over a very large colony on the eastern seaboard to oversee. Sensibly enough, he authorised Howard to act as he saw fit in South Australia, with little or no direct oversight. He licensed Howard as incumbent of the ‘Church of the Holy Trinity’. Some ardent voluntarists in the colony objected to these arrangements either on the general grounds that no bishop should have anything to do with their colony, or that the fees were exorbitant and a

profiteering racket, but these complaints gained little traction.²³ Undeterred, Howard went about the normal duties of an Anglican clergyman, conducting services and preaching weekly, and offering the other ordinances of the church, such as marriage, baptism and burial, to those who requested them.

The voluntarist critique of the time was well developed in England, as explained above. Many who came to the colony, especially Congregationalists and Baptists, regarded it a breach of good faith that the Church of England in the colony should receive state aid. Such arrangements, they believed, were unjust and divisive. That critique had come aboard the *Buffalo*, revealed in Captain Hindmarsh's attitude and in Stephenson's diary. It pursued Howard in particular in the colony, sometimes with little regard for fact or feeling. This voluntarist campaign was maintained, and, when state aid for churches was introduced into the colony in 1847 by Governor Robe, it was widely resisted. It lasted only until 1851, when the newly elected Legislative Council promptly abolished it. That is another tale.²⁴

The Colonial Chaplain, prescribed by the 1834 Act, as a government officer, was authorised to conduct and register marriages as a clergyman of the United Church of England and Ireland. This might have suggested that the English arrangements and habits of the 1810s and 1820s remained in place, and that the Church of England would be a privileged church in South Australia. A closer look suggests otherwise: Howard's salary and allowances (which eventually included a horse) were the only official benefit he received. No other favourable terms were provided. In South Australia, unlike in New South Wales, there was no government grant of land or capital, nor any regulations specifying the boundaries of parishes. The Church of England in the colony would have to raise its own funds to build a church, built on land that the church, or its delegates, could buy, under the same conditions as everybody else.

We have seen how Howard had told the planners in London at his interview for the post that he preferred the security of a fixed government-funded salary to reliance on voluntary contributions. In South Australia he wrote to the Governor more than once seeking state assistance for his church, claiming that his appointment implied the government was obliged to assist his church as is explained below. At no point did

the governors agree. Plainly, all churches in the colony would have to rely on voluntary support for their activities. Especially for the Church of England this represented a significant new way of expressing the relationship between the state and the churches in the British Empire. This was voluntarism in action. The state was vacating this space largely in response to vigorously expressed public opinion, first in England, and then elsewhere in the Empire. South Australia was probably the first case. By the end of the century it would become the effective norm across Australia.

In this voluntarist environment, the possibility of the Church of England gaining a place in South Australia therefore turned on the appointment of the Colonial Chaplain, who would also be the incumbent of Trinity Church. The concept of the English parish, defined geographically, and founded on a long-term endowment enough to care for the building and pay a living income to the incumbent, was plainly not going to happen in South Australia. The challenge to raise the funds to sustain the church, if not to pay the clergyman, would be the principal issue facing the worshippers and trustees of Trinity Church for the next few years. While tacitly accepted by the members of the congregation, this was a turning point for the Church of England in South Australia. Trinity Church had embraced the voluntary principle in religion, and had entered into direct public competition for acceptance alongside the churches of the other denominations that had been so promptly planted in the colony.

Where to locate their church was the first major question to exercise the minds of the trustees and Chaplain Howard. The trustees held an entitlement to a town acre, donated by Grenfell in London. When the surveyors had done enough work on the town survey to designate the town acres on a map and on the ground, Colonel Light, the Surveyor General, convened a meeting of the holders of land orders for town acres in March 1837 to allocate them by ballot. Before the beginning of the ballot, Light recommended that the land order held by the trustees of Trinity Church be exercised at his recommendation and that Acre Nine, on North Terrace, be chosen.²⁵ Light argued that this acre facing the road to Port Adelaide, with the river crossing over the Torrens immediately to its front would be at the centre of the town. That suggestion was readily accepted by the meeting, perhaps the last time the Church of England received privileged treatment in the

colony. Light's prediction about the significance of the site was soon falsified. That river crossing was only a ford, and other sites were preferred for the erection of a bridge over the Torrens. The location of Government House on the brow of the rise and next to the road to the north across a bridge over the Torrens soon drew houses and businesses in that direction. In addition traders soon favoured the narrower east-west streets over the wider terraces because of the shelter from the elements they provided. As a result Acre Nine and the church erected upon soon lay somewhat isolated from the affairs and homes of many of the settlers.²⁶

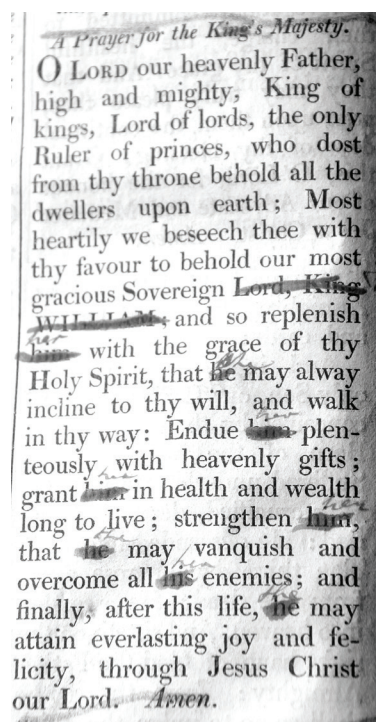
Furthermore, as already mentioned, the knockdown timber frame building was no longer of any use. It meant that the trustees would have to borrow funds from the banks to erect a permanent church as soon as possible. This disaster was an unexpected immediate burden. The foundation stone of this building was laid on 26 January 1838 'in the presence of a numerous assemblage of persons whom so interesting a ceremony naturally collected together.' Governor Hindmarsh spoke briefly before laying the stone, and Howard preached on Nehemiah 2.20 ('The God of Heaven, he will prosper us; therefore, we his servants will arise and build').²⁷

In the meantime a series of temporary arrangements had to suffice: using some of the salvaged timber and some sails for shelter, then hiring space in early commercial buildings, the congregation began regular weekly worship. While the church building project was begun promptly and worship was being conducted in the building by mid-1838, by 1843 the trustees found that the initial work had been rushed and inadequate. They were forced into a major stabilisation of the footings and hence the temporary closure of the North Terrace building. Fortunately by then another clergyman, James Farrell, had arrived. A second church building had been opened in October 1841. This was St John's in Halifax Street, in the south-east of the town.

The church building on North Terrace provided the much desired permanent setting for the conduct of regular worship as prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer. When news arrived of the succession of Queen Victoria late in 1837, the clerk's copy of the Prayer Book was duly amended to insert the name of the new monarch in the state prayers. (Fig. 6) The regular patterns of Morning and Evening Prayer, the cycles of

prescribed scripture readings, the annual cycles of seasonal observances, and the occasional services for baptisms, marriages and funerals could now be conducted. The congregation of Trinity Church had brought their shared Church of England heritage, their religious identity they had brought with them from England, to be implanted in the colony.

Howard hired Mr Emory to be his clerk to assist him in conducting the Sunday services and as vergers to look after the building. Its erection was funded largely by bank loans. These loans very nearly brought disaster as the colony slipped into depression in 1841. Howard wrote to Governor Grey in November 1841 pleading for the Treasury to purchase Trinity Church: 'I humbly conceive that it is the duty of a Government where it appoints a chaplain, to provide him with a suitable church in which to officiate'.²⁸ As already noticed, Grey declined, and Howard once more had to accept that his church would have to rely on voluntary subscriptions to survive in this new colony. Careful management by the trustees, by now a new team, and the revival of the colony's economy, driven by Kapunda copper, saved the day. It also tells us there were committed members of the Church of England who continued to support the congregation of Trinity Church on North Terrace, alongside other Church of England churches that were established as more funds and clergy became available.



Prayer for the Sovereign with amendments, Book of Common Prayer, Trinity Church Adelaide (Photo: Brian Dickey)



S.T. Gill, Australia, 1818–1880 Trinity Church, Adelaide 1845 watercolour, 27.3x39 cm. Gift of the South Australian Company, 1890 (Art Gallery of South Australia)

The names of the members of the North Terrace congregation were inscribed on an 1844 seating plan forwarded to the government as part of another pitch for the government to buy the building and receive the pew rents to help pay the debt. These people raised more than £2000 to pay off the debt in about three years once prosperity returned, so that in 1848 the trustees could ask the newly arrived Bishop Short to consecrate the church to the ‘one Holy and Undivided Trinity’.²⁹ It is a good marker to show that the people’s church had indeed been planted in a distant land.

The very temporary schoolroom across North Terrace from Acre Nine, thrown up in 1837–38, shows how important the congregation regarded the provision of a place where children could be taught. With the aid of others, notably Mrs Maria Gawler, wife of the second governor and from a strong evangelical family in Derby, enrolments grew. The first anniversary of the Sunday school was celebrated in mid-1838, and by 1845 enrolments had grown to 193. By the late 1840s a permanent schoolroom had been built.

There are references to churchwardens operating by 1841, indicating that the congregation had taken care to appoint men willing to attend to the regular administration of the congregation.³⁰ No records survive of annual vestry meetings in Howard’s time. Perhaps matters were so fraught because of the colony’s financial crisis and the changes in trustees to skip the formality. Howard took great care to provide musical accompaniment, hiring Charles Platts to bring a seraphine (a free-standing reed organ) which he played at services. Platts was a music entrepreneur, conducting a retail store for

some years marketing music and instruments. Howard put together a collection of hymns in a small book which he published in 1838 and presumably used on Sundays. A collector was appointed to collect the annual pew rents, as also was a ‘pew opener’ or usher. Howard ensured Mr Platts would play his seraphine at these services (for a fee).

The only appreciation we have of Howard’s public persona and his style in the pulpit comes from the *South Australian Magazine* in January 1842. The writer complimented Howard for promoting cordiality and good feeling in the colony, avoiding petty strife and maintaining an urbane and gentlemanly deportment. Of his preaching the commentator remarked:

Simple and pleasing, but it possesses neither sufficient unction or fervour to make him what is usually called a popular preacher ... there is sufficient ... to secure a variety, and to convince you that you are not listening to a mere moralist in religion but to one who has an implicit regard to the doctrines of the New Testament.³¹

This did not stop snide criticisms appearing in the Adelaide press.³² Howard was prompted to defend himself on more than one occasion; on one occasion he made a notable declaration that showed his clear affiliation with the Evangelical party within the Church of England. He claimed, when thanking supporters for their publicly expressed confidence in him, that he recommitted himself ‘to set forth “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Cor 2:3) as the only foundation for a sinner’s hopes, and the sanctification of His Spirit as the only satisfactory evidence of having secured an interest in his salvation’.³³ It was a succinct statement of the Evangelical view of salvation and the Christian life.



First Sunday school for Trinity Church (SLSA B8042)

Howard was at first the only clergyman in the colony, and until 1840, the only clergyman of an established church in the colony. As Colonial Chaplain, Howard served the whole colony, not just the congregation which walked to church on North Terrace on Sundays. The effort involved in ministering to his dispersed flock was immense. It was mitigated when the local administration granted him an allowance to keep a horse, which he named 'Luther'. Trinity Church's marriage register shows that Howard was diligent in conducting marriage services, some 590 during his incumbency. Relief came in 1840 with the arrival of the Revd James Farrell, who conducted his first marriage on 1 October that year, and also with the arrival of the Church of Scotland minister Robert Haining later that same year.³⁴ There was a change in colonial law in 1842 consonant with the English legislation of 1836 which provided for more general access to marriage registration by authorised clergy of any denomination.³⁵ Howard conducted town funerals in the Church of England section of the West Terrace cemetery.³⁶ The country land order was cashed in by the purchase of land on the plains to the north-east, and rented to a local farmer to provide a modest cash flow for the trustees. Much later it would be sold for the erection of housing. The new suburb was named, appropriately enough, Trinity Gardens.

The economic downturn of 1841–43 made church finances worse. Unable to repay their bank loan, Howard and the trustees sought other solutions. We have already noticed Howard's appeal in 1841 for the government to buy the church. As already mentioned, the church's financial crisis was only solved by the return to prosperity in the colony led by the discovery of copper at Kapunda in 1846 and then later at Burra in 1851.

But the growing dispersal of the colony would, in effect, be the cause of Howard's death. He was committed to pastoral care. When a call came from a family at Mount Barker in the winter of 1843 Howard did not hesitate to hurry to the bed of a dying man. The journey home on Luther was through a rainstorm. A chill turned to pneumonia and soon he was dead, as much worn out by overwork as the victim of infection at the age of thirty-six. But Howard's death was not the end of Trinity Church. It continued with a new incumbent (James Farrell) quickly appointed and services were maintained as usual. The story of its life from that time onward to the present time has been told elsewhere.³⁷

Conclusion

Setting out from England with a bundle of hopes, habits, intentions and resources to a distant land, these members of the Church of England responded to the challenges of the new colony as best they could. They became the congregation of Trinity Church on North Terrace, the first Church of England congregation in South Australia. They successfully transplanted their heritage from England and reshaped it to fit in the new environment. Trinity Church was a typical early nineteenth century Church of England congregation. It plainly had Low Church preferences such as hymn singing, simple services, and a relaxed view of other denominations. The bishop was conveniently far away. It contained the usual mix of conventional and convinced attenders. The Bible and the Prayer Book shaped their identity. By the later 1840s the congregation was financially stable. The congregation was well-taught and cohesive, learning resilience for the good times and the hard times that might lie ahead. They had early focussed on the importance of children's ministry, and their Sunday school thrived. They were led by Charles Beaumont Howard until his death in 1843. He was a self-confessed Evangelical who preached from the Bible, eager to see people converted to faith and live as active Christians. At the same time, Howard's urbane inclusive manner commended him to the South Australian community at large. This then was the story of the commencement of the Church of England in South Australia.

About the Author

Dr Brian Dickey taught history at Flinders University for thirty-three years, and has authored or edited fifteen books, including *Holy Trinity Adelaide 1836–2012: the history of a city church*. He remains an active member of that church. He has been a member of the Professional Historians Association of South Australia since its foundation in the 1980s.

Endnotes

1. A shorter version of this essay was presented at the conference convened by the South Australian Church History Network, 'Paradise of Dissent Revisited', on 4 May 2024. I am grateful for the opportunity to present a paper at it, and to Dr David Hilliard for much advice and encouragement in this project, as he has done over many years. The conference was aimed, as its title suggests, at encouraging new ways of investigating and reporting on the religious history of South Australia in the nineteenth century. It certainly prompted me to re-examine the story of the establishment of Holy Trinity Adelaide. For fuller details of that history, see Brian Dickey, *Holy Trinity Adelaide 1836–2012: the history of a city church*, Trinity Church Trustees, Adelaide, 2013.
2. Wm IV cap XCV An Act to empower His Majesty to erect *South Australia* into a British Province or Provinces, and to provide for the Colonization and Government thereof. Assented to 15 August 1834. Reproduced in Brian Dickey and Peter Howell (eds), *South Australia's Foundations: select documents*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1986, pp.43–50.
3. Some of the immense variety of these societies is captured briefly in John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: the age of Wilberforce, More Chalmers and Finney*, Nottingham, Inter-Varsity Press, 2006, pp.158–169, and these only refer to evangelical activism.
4. *South Australian Church Society*, London, 1834. The pamphlet is reproduced in Brian Dickey and Peter Howell (eds), *South Australia's Foundation: select documents*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1986, pp.27–28.
5. *South Australian Church Society*, London, 1834. Dickey and Howell, p.28
6. Gerald Bray, 'Canon Law and the Church of England,' in Anthony Milton (ed), *Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662*: Oxford History of Anglicanism, vol.1, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp.168–185. These canons remained in force in England until 1964/1969. Canons 80–90 deal with churchwardens.
7. The Act also provided for a similar appointment from the Church of Scotland, also an established church in the United Kingdom. For the discussions between Howard and the planning committee, see Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1967 (2nd ed), pp.118–9.
8. The complicated story of these people is untangled by Pike, ch. 5. For convenience he calls them 'the Adelphi planners' after the building in which they met. They were eventually replaced by the government-appointed Colonization Commissioners for South Australia, mainly drawn from that informal group of promoters. See also R.M. Gibbs, *Under the Burning Sun: a history of colonial South Australia, 1836–1900*, Southern Heritage, Adelaide, 2013 for further general background on this and the general story of the colony.
9. Jeremy Morris, *The People's church: a history of the Church of England*, Profile, London, 2022.
10. The title of Pike's book, *Paradise of Dissent*, drew attention to this sense of opportunity and self-expression available in the new colony. Pike intended it to refer well beyond just religion. See pp.52, 130, 495, 516.
11. Provisions included the abolition of two archbishoprics and eight bishoprics, along with major reductions in church income and much more. See Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1966, p.56.
12. Pike, p.119.
13. John W. Adams, *My Early Days in the Colony*, Adelaide, 1902, p.3.
14. Howard to *Register*, 29 Jul 1837. They are now in SRG 94/A2/1, State Library of South Australia (SLSA). The Trinity archive in this record group is extensive if not complete.
15. A.G. Price, 'Extracts from the journal of a voyage in His Majesty's Ship "Buffalo" from England to South Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch*, vol. 30, 1928–29, pp.21–75.
16. J. Hindmarsh to G.F. Angas, 15 February [1837], quoted in G.L. Fischer (ed), 'Captain John Hindmarsh's Letters to George Fife Angas', *South Australianiana*, vol.1, no.2, Sep 1962, p.52.
17. David Hilliard, *Godliness and Good Order: a history of the Anglican Church in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1986, p.5.
18. John Cameron, *In Stow's Footsteps: A Chronological History of the Congregational Churches in South Australia 1837–1977*, South Australian Congregational History Project Committee, Adelaide, 1987, pp.6–10; Pike, pp.257, 423.
19. Arnold Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: a history of Methodism in South Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1985, ch.2, and generally.
20. On early South Australian Baptists, see H. Estcourt Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years: the Baptist Church of South Australia*, South Australian Baptist Union, Adelaide, 1937, pp.17–34, and John Walker, 'Prosecuting business, maintaining piety and preaching the gospel: Baptist businesspeople in colonial South Australia', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 51, 2024, pp.8–23.
21. *South Australian Register* (hereafter *Register*), 2 December 1848, p.2.
22. I am grateful to John Walker for the basis of this paragraph on the Baptists. See Walker, 'Prosecuting business'. The complexities of the Dissenting groups in England in the early nineteenth century are covered more fully (over four dense pages), by David Bebbington, 'The growth of voluntary religion' in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianities: world Christianities c1815–c1914*, vol 8, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp.53–56: my thanks to David Hilliard for this reference.
23. *Register* 8 Jul 1837, Howard's reply *Register* 29 July 1837 and the editorial comment: 'why is a public parish attached to a private undertaking of the Church of the Holy Trinity?'

24. Pike, pp.353–391.
25. The acres were numbered eastwards along North Terrace from the north-west corner with West Terrace.
26. To be fair, many villas were erected on Hindley Street, whose residents could walk to Trinity Church. The later processes of full commercialisation of Trinity's environment gradually removed that option.
27. *Register*, 17 February 1838, p.3.
28. Howard to Governor Grey, 5 November 1841, GRG 24/1, SLSA, cited by Janet Scarfe, 'Bridge of Polished Steel as Fine as a Hair: The Oxford Movement in South Australia, 1836–1881', MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1974, p.72. Grey however made a substantial personal donation to the rescue fund.
29. *Register*, 2 August 1848. [This appears to be a contributed news item possibly provided by a Trinity Church representative.]
30. It may be noted that the term 'parish' is not used in this essay with reference to the Church of England in the colony. This is because, while Trinity Church was the sole congregation, that concept made no sense. But after that, geographic parishes were never formally constituted in the Diocese of Adelaide, except for some minor administrative matters.
31. 'The South Australian Pulpit', *South Australian Magazine*, January 1842, pp.241–6.
32. *Register*, 12 January 1839, correspondence; 21 August 1841 correspondence.
33. *Register*, 12 Jan 1839.
34. Farrell must have been busy establishing St John's, popularly called 'in the wilderness', later Halifax Street. He only conducted fifteen weddings registered at Trinity Church from 1840 to Howard's death in July 1843.
35. Marriage Act and Births and Deaths Registration Act 1836 (UK); Marriage Act 1842 SA.
36. This area is now labelled 'old Anglican', to be found on the north-east corner of the cemetery.
37. For the subsequent history of the church see Dickey, *Holy Trinity Adelaide, 1836–2012*. For the wider story of the Church of England in South Australia, see Hilliard. In the 1844 Census, 9418 people were listed as Church of England, fifty-four per cent of the total (17366 people). Wray Vamplew, Eric Richards, Dean Jaensch, and Joan Hancock, *South Australian Historical Statistics*, History Project Incorporated, Sydney, [1988], table 7–1.