



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2017

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A Tribute to Bill Hall

by Owen and Margaret Heldon

On the 5th of December last year William Alfred Hall (Bill) entered the spiritual world following a fatal heart attack at the Housing Commission premises where he lived in North Rockhampton, Queensland. He was 87 years old. Unfortunately details of his passing came too late for our minister Todd to be involved in the funeral. Furthermore we heard that Bill had left his humble estate to the Hurstville New Church and that there had only been a cremation arranged by distant family and no service. We were told that all his belongings were still in his unit and that the Housing Commission would be required to throw everything out before renting out to a new resident. Due to widespread concern amongst members of the Hurstville Society we offered to travel to Rockhampton in mid January to dispose of Bill's belongings in an orderly manner and give him the respect he deserved. Several of us had regular contact with Bill via phone and letters and of course he often wrote articles for this publication. He had been associated with our society from the mid 1960s.

Rockhampton Surprise

The whole exercise proved to be rewarding in an unexpected way. We met Bill's friends and were impressed to learn that he was well respected by all who knew him. Bill was never afraid to speak about his religion and always made every effort to live it, which is a central teaching of our church. He would often provide quotes from the Writings of Swedenborg or sermons to help those who were struggling with problems in their lives. Most of Bill's belongings found new homes with his resident friends at the Housing Commission complex. We are sure that the comradeship shown as his friends made choices of things that would be useful to them would have put a smile on Bill's face!

From Bill's papers we discovered there was a couple who lived down the road who were good friends so we decided to call on them to make sure they knew about Bill's death. They did, but we also learnt that Bill's local friends had been shocked that the family did not want to do a funeral service so they organised their own Memorial Service on 20th December with an Anglican minister. We were given a copy of the Order of Service and later when we returned home to Sydney a Eulogy which had been written and read at the service by his friend Lawrie Fox, was emailed to us.

Since returning we have been busy going through some of Bill's personal papers and photos which we were able to bring back. We wanted to write a tribute to Bill for our Newsletter but realised there were many gaps in our information. We began contacting church friends of his from far and wide. The response has been gratifying. We take this opportunity to thank all of you who willingly participated in helping us get a more comprehensive perspective on Bill's life. He was indeed an inspiring person with many hidden talents.

Early Life

Born at the newly established Goshen Private Hospital (now Hurstville Private Hospital) on 26 March 1929, Bill grew up on his family's poultry farm at Milperra. We don't know

much about his early life except that he was teased at school which impacted his life. He was small for his age, did not like sport and had very few friends. In Bill's own words he "could not understand how anyone could possibly feel such intense dislike of another person to deliberately and intentionally cause painful and humiliating distress to them".

As a child he learnt the piano. Later in his life, in Rockhampton, he would play for a lady he knew in a nursing home to give her comfort. We also know a good friend of his committed suicide on Christmas Eve in 1954 affecting him deeply. A surprise find in Bill's unit was a painting by him of the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton – one of his hidden talents!



Bill as a young man

Finding The New Church

As regards how Bill found out about The New Church, just this week we have come into the possession of a letter he wrote to Rev Don Rose, The Editor, New Church Life in 1998.

The Gift that Led Me to Discover The New Church

I was interested to note that you had a Friday evening program in January with people describing how they came into contact with The New Church. Perhaps you may be interested to know how I first came into The New Church.

I was introduced to the New Church by Mr Wainscot of the Swedenborg Society in London. The event that led me to contact the Swedenborg Society was my receiving a copy of *TCR* [*True Christian Religion*, Emanuel Swedenborg] from a friend, **Dr Philip W Groves**, as a farewell gift when I was leaving Sydney in 1962 by ship for London where I stayed just over a year. Dr Groves is a spiritual psychologist.

Philip told me he first came across *TCR* and *Heaven and Hell* while browsing in the religious department of Dymock's, a large bookstore in Sydney's CBD. Philip bought these books. Philip visited London about 1960-61 and visited the Swedenborg Society.

As Philip gave me the copy of *TCR*, I remember he said to me, "You may wish to call into the Swedenborg Society. Mr Wainscot is a friendly man." I was indeed grateful to call into the Swedenborg Society and to meet Mr Wainscot. When I enquired about the New Church in London, Mr Wainscot provided me with the complete list of New Churches in London. When I returned to this continent about 1963, I contacted both the Hurstville Society and the Sydney Society of the New Church.

Above I mentioned Philip Groves as being a friend. Since Philip gave me my first introduction to the Divine Revelation you may be interested to learn how we met. We first met about 1950 through Philip's mother when I was on my lunch break in a cafeteria in town. Seated opposite me was a pleasant older woman. Though we did not know one another Philip's mother introduced herself to me and said, "My son is giving some Sunday night lectures. You may care to come along." Then Mrs Groves gave me the city address of the lectures. I went along to the lectures and found them interesting and stimulating. Obviously, there was no mention of Swedenborg in those lectures, as Philip's first contact with the Divine Revelation was his coming across the Everyman's Editions of *TCR* and *Heaven and Hell* in the religious department of Dymock's bookstore in Sydney about 1960.

I feel impelled to express my deep thanks to Mrs Groves and Philip Groves, Mr Wainscot, and to everyone, pastors and laypeople, associated with the New Church for my contacts with the New Church. I pray my life shall express my gratitude.

More Overseas Travel

As far as we know that was Bill's first overseas trip but more were to follow. One of his passports shows that he was granted a Student Visa from July to December 1977 to study in Italy. We believe he studied Italian. When he finished this he travelled through Europe and ended up living in the UK for six months. While he was there he acquired, in London, a Student Visa to study at the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn USA. He flew out of Heathrow in May 1978 to the USA. However because College didn't start until September he travelled by Greyhound Coach across the States from San Francisco to Philadelphia. He spent two years in College and earned his Diploma of Associate Arts before returning home in 1980.

Bill worked as a courier for Westpac Bank in Sydney from 1968 to 1988. He mentions in a piece he wrote in 2007 called *Reflections* that "Because I worked long hours, I received good wages from Westpac. Also, when I had been away from this country for about two years [studying in Bryn Athyn] Westpac kindly re-employed me when I returned. Also when my father was ill [he cared for his father during this time] and took him to the hospital where he died that morning, Westpac paid me for the entire week I was off work. So I am always grateful to Westpac's transport manager for his understanding and compassion".

People reading this article will know that Bill had a love of writing. Here is another quote from *Reflections*: "While I was living at Elizabeth Bay [1981 to 1988] I noticed computers becoming more and more available. I had learned keyboard skills at the age of twenty-five and have always enjoyed using the keyboard. I remember a computer shop not far from where I lived but I never went in and enquired about a computer. This was not so much because of the lack of time but because, in my unfortunate ignorance, I was not certain I would be able to become proficient in using a computer. During that time I did a writing course [by correspondence] from the United States on writing for young people. Having a computer would have been a great help. I'm grateful I completed the course. It was useful and I am sure I still make use of the writing techniques I learned from that helpful course." While on this topic we found in Bill's unit a Diploma for a

Course of Home Study in Freelance Writing from DK Direct-Training, Australia dated April 1996. And by the way he did become proficient on the computer and even taught others how to use one.

There is no doubt that Bill wished to become a more knowledgeable person so he could be of use to others. In 1990 he returned to Bryn Athyn to finish the last two years of College, graduating with a **Bachelor of Arts** in June 1992. On his return – he was now 63 years old – he had a period of time deciding where he would live. He started in Sydney then moved to Tamworth for a few months where there was a New Church Group. However he had a good friend in Rockhampton whom he had often visited. We have records of him being there parts of 1993 and 1994 and by March 1994 he settled into a caravan park until in January 1995 the Housing Commission unit where he spent the rest of his life became available.



Graduation June 1992
Bachelor of Arts

Useful volunteer work in retirement

He didn't waste any time setting about being a useful member of the Rockhampton community. As early as August 1994 he was volunteering in the City Library doing clerical work in the Archives. Not long after he helped out in the Riverside Tourist Centre answering tourist enquiries. He took up several years of study with Central Queensland Institute of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) achieving Certificate 111 in Community and Human Service and Certificate 111 in Volunteer Tutoring (English as a Second Language). We have been handed another of Bill's pieces entitled, *My Experience with Volunteer Literacy Tutoring* when he was still in the program in October 2000 where he says: "Early in 1998 I saw an ad in the free Capricorn Local News offering tuition for people interested in becoming volunteer literacy tutors. Along with fifteen other people I began the class. One of the vital things we learned was to tune into the student's wavelength and try to see where the student is as regards literacy. We did this when working one-to-one with a student in the classroom." We have heard from various sources that Bill loved his work helping foreign immigrants learn English.

Eulogies

We'd like to share what others have to say about Bill.

Rev Dan Pendleton. The following letter was found inside a book among Bill's belongings called *The Great Artists, Book 1, Van Gogh*. Dated November 1979 it was hand written on the back of stiff card which had on it the simple quote "Love opens the

way” *Divine Providence* 60. Bill was studying at the Academy of the New Church at the time.

Dear Bill, The thing that I would like to emphasize to you is how much I have felt, and appreciated, your presence in the classroom as a mature man (male). Often when I would be trying to express an idea from the Writings in application and would feel that the members of the class were simply not old enough to get what I was trying to say, I would look at the back of the room, catch sight of you, and think to myself, “Bill knows what I’m talking about.” It helped. Your teacher and friend.

Ralph Horner who supplied much valuable information for this article. “For me, what stands out about Bill is that he lived in the present.”



Peter Taylor and **Maret Genzlinger** first had contact with Bill when they were children in the Hurstville Society. Their father Rev Doug Taylor was the pastor here from 1963 to 1974. They remember Bill being a ‘newcomer’ in the church then and many years later when he studied in Bryn Athyn they were good friends. One thing they told us was that some Ghanaian students who were there at the same time as Bill had a great affection for him.

Rev Ian Arnold. I remember Bill well from the times when in the 1970s and early 1980s, he then a messenger for the Bank of New South Wales/Westpac, would call at 55 Clarence St for a chat. Highlights for me, about Bill, are his uncomplicated, honest, commitment to live out his New Church convictions, his friendliness, and the underlying innocence which was there. Never a complaint and always gratitude for what was.

Rev Erik E Sandstrom. I can verify that Bill was a student here in Bryn Athyn College, since he took a class with me; I think it was Christian Church History. He was very attentive, and passed easily. When I was a pastor of the Hurstville Society (1981-1998), he was a regular part of the congregation and a constant contributor to the Courier.

Rev Walter Orthwein. I remember Bill fondly from his College years in Bryn Athyn. He was an interesting and amusing fellow. He was a very lively and fun conversationalist.

Michael Brown who was Bill’s Psychology teacher in Bryn Athyn and who remained a lifelong friend. On the surface Bill had a hard life; under the surface Bill was one of the most angelic people I have ever met. He was lonely but felt accepted in Bryn Athyn. He loved writing and was very observant and very sensitive. At his core, he loved the Lord. One quote of Bill’s, out of context: “there is no doubt in my mind that I am much happier when my efforts are directed toward being of use to others.

Paul and Nina Schorran. Bill was part of our lives in Australia as well as Bryn Athyn where we first met when he and Paul were students in College. Bill did love and live his religion.

Lawrie Fox from his Eulogy mentioned at the beginning of this article. Bill was the kindest person I think I have ever known; he had true Christian principles. No matter how harshly some people would treat Bill, he always saw their good side. I first met Bill when we were cataloguing old photographs at the Rockhampton city council library and then at the Information Centre. Bill's favourite movie was Forrest Gump, he would always quote to me the saying from the movie: "Life is like a box of chocolates, you don't know what you're going to get." Bill had a very good brain. It was really astonishing to me how he could relay back to me every conversation we had; the date I said it and the time of day. Bill was a faithful member of the 60's and Better group. He enjoyed the walking group and he helped people learn about computers. Bill enjoyed tutoring overseas students English, in particular one student from Korea. He would catch buses with him and take him to different places to teach him English; places like the Botanical gardens or the library.

Living in Rockhampton Bill may have felt isolated from the church at times but we believe he performed a great use in his community helping others in any way he could.

In a letter in 1998 after returning from a trip to Sydney he wrote: "When I first got back to Rocky, I was very conscious of how far away I am from the Hurstville Society. This made me feel sad. After a while I calmed down and was able to perceive that I have a lot of blessings here and that I can, as if from self, endeavour to do the Lord's will in Rocky.



Margaret and Owen visiting Bill in 2005

We hope that you have been inspired by Bill's life to become a more useful person. His favourite quote was: "Heaven consists in this, that from the heart we wish better for others than for ourselves, and desire to be of service to others to promote their happiness, and this for no selfish end, but from love" (*Arcana Coelestia* 452).

Mindful Communication Challenge Wrap Up

We will be finishing up our spiritual growth program on the **12th of March**, and like the last couple of years we're going to have a harvest/end-of-the-program luncheon to finish things off. It'll be a **pot-luck lunch**, and we'll also be collecting non-perishable food items for the Kogarah Store House. As usual, they're also interested in toiletries as well. So come along, join in the fun, bring a lunch that can be shared, and bring some non-perishable items for local folks in need.

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Perth Visit

It has been a while since I visited our friends out in Perth. As such, arrangements have been made for me to visit March 17-19. As usual I'll fly out on Friday run a couple of classes, as well as church on Sunday that will include Holy Supper. We'll arrange for a lay service here.

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Pulpit Swap

Absence makes the heart grow fonder, right? Julian and I have been trying to schedule a pulpit swap for a while now, and the date that makes the most sense is **26 March**, which means there will be two weeks in a row that I won't be on holiday but won't be preaching here!

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Church Gardens

We had a couple of productive working bees in 2016, and would like to continue that into 2017, perhaps increasing the frequency. Another idea to support the upkeep of the gardens is that of offering various-sized sections out to be 'adopted' by individuals, couples and families of our society. That way, people could come by and tend to their plots of land in their own time, on their own schedule. Let's give that a try, shall we, and see how it goes?

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Social Tennis

Our court's Friday morning social tennis group is looking to bolster its numbers, otherwise it will have to fold. May we interest you in joining us? You needn't have much experience (although some is helpful!), nor even a racket; we just need committed, interested bodies, at this point. Come on out and try it for free, subsequently it's \$7/morning or \$20/month. Talk to Jenn with any questions or interest (jenn@beiswenger.net, 0411 719 754). Check out our new Facebook page as well:

www.facebook.com/HNCTennis. Hope to see you on the court!

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Corrections

In last month's newsletter I reported that on Trivia Night that it was Julian's team that came from behind to win. I have been informed that this was in fact not the case. You see, I happen to be married to a person who was on the winning team and she assures me that it was David Millar's team that won. So great apologies to Team Millar, and may you now carry on in 2017 with your full glory as the nationally recognized Trivia Night Champions.

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Todd,

I am replying to your editorial letter of the Feb. 2017 New Church Newsletter, Hurstville, concerning the "abridged" *Arcana Coelestia* produced by Willard Mansfield.

I do not doubt the author's good intentions in offering help to those who may feel that they cannot read the version that the Lord intended us to read. I know that there are many people who feel unable to read the 12 (English) volumes of the *Arcana* or any 12 of the works of the Writings, because of the time involved when they may have home or work duties or various problems. However, I do hope that this abridged *Arcana Coelestia* will never be seen as a substitute for what the Lord provided for the establishment of His New Church and for humankind's regeneration. If we have the time, I feel strongly that we should be reading unabridged versions and not looking for a quick read.

I for one have read the full work. That first reading took me several years, and although I found a lot of it difficult, I found it instructive and rewarding and was glad not to have missed any of it. Reading through the original version is a big project, no doubt about that, but I would strongly encourage and highly recommend that you embark on what I assure you will be a fantastic spiritual journey.

Yours sincerely,
Heulwen Ridgway,
Canberra.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Don Macfarlane** (7th), **Debbie Walsh** (7th), **Graham Horner** (12th), **Edward Horner** (18th)

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