


#52 Ancestors Week 17 At Worship

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#52 Ancestors Week 17 - At Worship

I have written before about my Methodist ancestors, the Whittens. In a family of staunch Methodists, perhaps the most pious of them was my great grandmother, Charlotte.

Charlotte Mason was born at Bathurst on 17 July, 1842, the daughter of immigrants Richard and Jane Mason. Her parents had arrived in the colony in March 1842, with their four young children, Phoebe, Grace, Giles and Eliza. Richard is described on his immigration papers as an agricultural labourer, from Tipperary in Ireland and on Charlotte's birth certificate is listed as a shepherd at Johnson's Stockyard Station.

Eliza died soon after their arrival in Bathurst and is buried at Kelso. Charlotte was born that year, too. I think about what it must have been like for the heavily pregnant Jane to cross the Blue Mountains from Sydney to Bathurst with her small children, while no doubt wearing layers of petticoats.

Before long, the family left Bathurst and travelled by bullock dray to Emu Creek in the Hunter Valley, to the country around Cessnock. Here, at the age of 12, Charlotte was "converted to God under the ministry of Rev John Watsford of West Maitland." (1)

At 23, Charlotte married Anthony Whitten at Scone, NSW. Anthony had 40 acres of land and a slab hut on a place he called "Lowestoft" at Lowes Creek, near Wallabadah. The young couple set off on horseback on their "honeymoon" – a trip which took them about 100 miles, over a mountain range. With them went their stock, consisting of 17 head of cattle, a bullock dray, 2 horses and a dog. Charlotte was to live at Lowestoft for the rest of her long life.

"In the early days, her nearest Church was Wallabadah, 10 miles away. For many years she attended that church, at first on horseback, and then by means of a cart. During her 63 years at Lowestoft, she was late for Church only twice." (2)

Charlotte and Anthony had 13 children in 19 years. Twins Richard and Joseph died in infancy but 11 grew to adulthood. It seems as if all of them were good members of the Church and two of their sons, Alfred and Albert, became Methodist ministers. My mother spoke of the Church being the centre of family life when she was young (despite having been born a Roman Catholic, my grandmother Josephine became active in the Quirindi Methodist church) and I remember attending a service in honour of my late grandfather sometime in the late 1950s when my grandmother donated improvements to the Church organ.

We have a report from the Quirindi Advocate about a party given to celebrate Charlotte's 84th birthday. Many family and friends had gathered for the occasion and, "as Rev E Barber was present, Mrs Whitten requested that a service should be held during the afternoon. Therefore a suitable service was held wherein gratitude was expressed for God's goodness in the past and that for her words of the psalmist were being fulfilled, "With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."(3)

Charlotte (above) - hand on bible

Charlotte was no doubt tested by her granddaughter Gladys' pregnancy in 1922. Gladys' mother had died in childbirth and so she was practically raised by her grandmother and her uncles – at least until her father remarried when she was 8 years old. The story I have heard is that the then 19 year-old Gladys became pregnant to one of the men working on the property but was prevented from marrying him because he was a Catholic. She went on to have the child (Rex) and raise him alone, and she never married. Both she and the child seem always to have been accepted within the family.



Another of Charlotte's challenges would have been the suicide of her daughter, Lottie in 1937, and it seems that it may have been family propriety that caused the damage. Lottie was in love with her cousin, Albert Moore, but the relationship was thwarted by her parents, who had a fear of inbreeding. Lottie was 27 when she took her own life, and Albert died a bachelor at the age of 66.

Charlotte's obituary speaks of her good works. "To know Mrs. Whitten was to admire her. Her stalwart Christian character, her keen insight, her loyalty to her Master, her generosity to her church, were some of the outstanding traits of her character. No worthy appeal was made to her that did not receive a worthy response, and many a good cause will miss her practical sympathy."(4)

She was a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and a donor to many good causes. I have found evidence of her donations to the Japanese Disaster Fund (1923), the Starving Children of Europe Fund (1922) and the Bellbird Mining Disaster Fund (1925). She gave generously to her Church, which erected a memorial tablet to her in 1944 in gratitude for her beneficence. More recently, after the unification of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists under the Uniting Church banner, the old Methodist Church in Quirindi was deconsecrated. It is now known as "The Whitten Room" and forms part of a collection of buildings used for accommodation and events.

Charlotte and Anthony are buried together in the cemetery at Wallabadah.

1. From an article in "The Methodist" 12 Feb 1944.
2. Ibid
3. The Quirindi Advocate 23 July 1926
4. Obituary in "The Methodist" 5 Nov 1927