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E.J. HILDER

A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT



From the Jubilee History

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E.J. HILDER: A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

Every so often there comes along an individual with an eye for detail and a precision of thought that is quite outstanding. Such a person is a wonderful asset to any organisation. In the church that individual becomes the very capable administrator: the secretary extraordinaire E. J. ("Jack") Hilder was such a person.

Much of what we know about Churches of Christ in NSW comes from notes and brief histories provided by him. His concise history of Churches of Christ in NSW is recorded in the Jubilee Conference Handbook of 1945. In addition, he left notes of a slide presentation he gave in 1935. Unfortunately the slides and photographic material he used have long disappeared. Several of his word portraits of Enmore members have been used in this monograph and help us to appreciate some of the remarkable people who inhabited "Enmore Incorporated". But more of him as an historian later. He told the story of others - now it is appropriate to tell his story.

When G. T. Walden was taking his farewell of the Enmore Church for the last time he spent most of his time extolling Hilder's worth. An extract of his speech was printed in the *Australian Christian*¹ under the heading "A Farewell and an Appreciation". Among other things, Walden said:

No man lives out more perfectly the Christian Endeavor slogan, "For Christ and the church," than our unassuming, Christ-honoring, Edwin John Hilder.²

Who was this man of whom one of the premier Evangelists in the Churches of Christ spoke with such respect, and what had he done to deserve it?

The Early Years

E.J. Hilder, for that is how his name most commonly appears in all forms of documentation, was born on the 28th October 1867 in Sydney. He was the fourth of nine children born to Hananiah (1835-1911) and Margaret Hilder (1838-1897).³ His father was born in Salehurst, Sussex, England, and his mother (nee Margaret Nance), in Penzance, Cornwall. Margaret came to Australia as a child and Hananiah as a nineteen year old.⁴

Both families seem to have found their way to the region around Kempsey on the Macleay River. The Nance's in particular located at an area known as Penlee, named after a town in Cornwall, near Penzance, where the parents grew up. It was here that Hananiah met Margaret Ann. They were married on the 13th April 1860. The wedding notice says it all:

HILDER—NANCE—April 13th, at St. John's Church, Paddington, by the Rev. James Milne, Hananiah Hilder, of the Macleay River, to Margaret Ann, fourth daughter of Mr. Thomas Nance, of Penlee, Macleay River.⁵

It seems they took up residence in Sydney as Hananiah formed a partnership with Francis Abigail in 1866 in a boot manufacturing, leather and grindery business, initially located at 60-62 York Street.⁶ Hilder was the senior partner. John Briggs later joined the partnership, but does not seem to have stayed in it long. Wanted advertisements appear in the classifieds in *The Sydney Morning Herald* for Hilder & Abigail until June 1875. It seems the partnership was dissolved about that time or shortly afterwards as Abigail continued business on his own in George Street.⁷ Hilder also continued in the boot manufacturing, leather and grindery business as *The Sydney Morning Herald* classifieds columns show.⁸ Wanted advertisements appear over the name of H. Hilder which also show that he had broadened his operations to include Newcastle.⁹

Hananiah also developed an interest in gold mining. In 1872 both he and Abigail each took up seventy five £1 shares in the General Moltke Gold Mining Company (Limited) which was seeking a licence to operate at Chambers Creek.¹⁰ Furthermore, with Francis Abigail and the brothers Thomas and John Hodson, he lodged an application for a gold mining lease for Jonathan's Gully, on Manus Creek, Tumbarumba, 2 miles up the creek from Glenroy Hotel; area, 25 acres. The application was lodged on 6th September, 1872. A notice from the Department of Mines on 29th October 1878 reads:

Notice is hereby given that, unless within thirty days from the date hereof, the applicants for the undermentioned Goldmining Leases furnish the Warden or Warden's clerk with such a description of the land applied for as shall enable the Surveyor to find it, or attend on the ground and point out the boundary marks of such land, the applications will be refused.

They clearly complied because the Lease (No.553) was granted in November 1878.¹¹ The outcome of these investment is unknown. His father's activities meant that E.J. grew up in a business atmosphere, but he does not seem to have joined his father in the business. Undoubtedly, however, he learned some business skills which he put to good use later.

An interesting story emerges from the 1881 *New South Wales Police Gazette*:

Sydney—A warrant has been issued by the Central Police Bench for the arrest of John White alias Pickles, charged, in company with John Randall alias Reynolds and Edward Randall alias Reynolds alias Thompson ... with stealing two boots (recovered), the property of Hananiah Hilder, on the 19th instant.¹²

White was arrested and sentenced to one month's imprisonment. His accomplices were given six months and three months respectively. This may indicate something of the economic conditions in Sydney at the time.

The young E.J. was enrolled in the Queen's School Darlinghurst where he took the Junior Public Examinations in October 1884, obtaining a grade I in each of history, geography and geology, and a grade II in physics.¹³ He followed this up by studying at the Technical College in Sydney (1885-1886) taking physics, sound, light, heat, and practical electricity. What he intended to do with this is unknown, because he became an accountant.¹⁴

In his late teens and early twenties he engaged in a variety of sporting activities. The sports results in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for 1888 and 1889 show that he had taken to cycling. He joined the Sydney Bicycle Club and entered races held by the different associations, usually in the One Hundred and Fifty Yards Flat Race Handicap. As a member of the Eastern Suburbs Amateur Athletics Club he participated in Saturday events. On 28th September 1889 he ran in the 150 yards handicap (off 13 yards) and the 200 yards Grand Handicap.¹⁵ His placings indicate that he was proficient, but not a champion.

The Roll Book of the Enmore Church indicates that he was living in Rockdale when he married Ellen Jean Hodgson at St. Peters in 1897, the year in which his mother died. After their marriage they took up residence in Newtown.¹⁶ They had two children, Eric Reginald (1900-1983) and Minnie Ruth (1904-2000).

The Local Church

Hilder's early church affiliation is a mystery. The membership roll of the Elizabeth Street Church indicates that a Mrs. Hilder, no initial or first name, was baptised there by J. W. Shepherd on August 30, 1891¹⁷. Moreover, Hilder's wife, Ellen, had been a member of the

Sydney Church, having been baptised there by F.W. Troy. She transferred her membership to Enmore on 28th November 1889. One might consider that he had his church roots in the Elizabeth Street Church. However, a Sister H. Hilder was baptised at Enmore on the 3rd February 1895, so it is more likely that his religious roots are to be found at Enmore.

Hilder was baptised at Enmore by G.T. Walden on 18th February 1899 and was received into the membership of the church on the following Sunday. Thus began his long and fruitful association with the Churches of Christ, and the Enmore and Marrickville churches in particular. It also began a close friendship between Hilder and Walden that was to last until Walden's death in 1939.

When James Kingsbury resigned the secretaryship of the Enmore Church on his appointment to the Adelaide branch of the AMP Society, Hilder became the acting secretary of the church. It was June 1900, barely eighteen months after his admission to membership. This is interesting, since the prior history of that church indicates great care was taken in the appointment of men to office. It seems to indicate that his Christian character and administrative ability was known to those who appointed him. Since the Bardsleys, for whom he most likely worked, were members of the Enmore Church, it is reasonable to assume they were the motivating force behind his appointment.¹⁸ In the December he was appointed the full secretary of the church, a position which he held continuously until his resignation in September 1935. In 1901 he was made a deacon and as such he gave the church thirty-five years of devoted and impeccable service.

Walden notes that Hilder presided at the Lord's Table for over twenty-five years. While in office he acted as secretary to many special committees for various purposes. On one occasion he was acting treasurer, was one of the trustees for the manse and was treasurer of the Manse Fund since its purchase.¹⁹ He was also one of the original trustees of the Marrickville property²⁰. His minutes and record keeping are superb, his correspondence is filed in appropriately dated "in" and "out" folders. One can easily trace the history of the Enmore Church from the church records. For the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Enmore Church, he prepared a lantern lecture on its history, clearing up by his research several matters that had been in doubt. For the state jubilee of NSW he prepared a lantern

lecture for the 1935 State conference on the fifty years of State “brotherhood” work. His dedication to the Enmore church was such that when he lived in Fletcher Street Marrickville, a short five minute walk from the Marrickville Church, and in Gower Street Hurlstone Park, he continued to worship and work at Enmore.

When he resigned the Enmore secretaryship it was because he was retiring from his working life and transferring his membership to the Marrickville church. Because of indifferent health his time at Marrickville was short, just over two years. Yet he entered fully into the life of that church. Within three months of taking up membership on 8th December 1935 he was elected to the Board of Officers.²¹ He went straight on to presiding at the Lord’s Table, as Service Plans show, and he shared in the ministry of taking communion to the shut-ins. At the mission conducted by T.H. Scambler in May 1937 he was the prayer convenor.²² His irenic spirit is seen in a particular communion talk given on 10th January 1937 aimed at healing a rift between the current minister and a member of long standing in the church. It is entitled “Friend, Wherefore Art Thou Come?” A summary was published in the *Marrickville Monthly Budget*. The editor of the church news concluded by saying “The foregoing summary of Bro. E.J. Hilder’s remarks at the Lord’s Table will be helpful to others besides those who heard them, and so we pass them on.”

He was a generous man. One Mother’s Day morning, 1938, a beautiful pulpit Bible, graciously given to the church by Hilder, was used for the first time. This was most appropriate, as the Bible was given to him by his mother. It was a very fine gesture, and it was greatly appreciated.²³ His time at Marrickville came to an end in December 1937 when because of sickness he moved to Kenmore, near Goulburn, to live with his son, his wife having died in 1933. Yet he kept touch with the Marrickville church. When the *Marrickville Monthly Budget* was replaced by the *Good News* a member sent him a copy. His reply was typical:

“... which I have read with interest. Congratulations on its appearance and get up, and for the fact that it has no advertisements. What a remarkable answer to prayer is that mentioned in the first issue! Yet how many people worry themselves miserable and into early graves. Express my greetings to all the friends, and assure them of my prayers.”

On his return to Sydney he went to live with his sister at Wahroonga and attended the Hornsby Church but he made frequent visits to Marrickville over the next ten years and maintained a keen interest in the life of that church.

The Brotherhood

On the 1th May 1885, at the instigation of the officers of the Newtown Church, a meeting of the five metropolitan churches took place. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the advisability of holding an annual conference. The suggestion received unanimous approval so several meeting were held to frame a constitution and elect the first officers²⁴ who were referred to as the Conference Committee. The Conference Committee had an executive made up of the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Hilder's work in the wider Churches of Christ family, called the Brotherhood in his time, was highly significant and may be categorised as general and committee work. In carrying out his many duties as a member of multifarious conference organisations Walden said that "he gave much time, great ability, and endeared himself to his associates in the work by his ability, gentility and Christlikeness."

His work in General Conference covered 39 years. Early Conference records are sparse, however they show him as a scrutineer for the election of officers at the 1900 Conference. At that stage he had been a member of Churches of Christ for just 18 months. He was a member of the Conference Committee continuously from 1911 to 1923 and then again from 1928 to 1938. During the latter period he served as both assistant secretary (1928-1929) and secretary (1930-1931). A lovely quirk of his being Conference Secretary and Enmore Secretary was that he had to write to himself. To get around the incongruity of this he always addressed the letters "Dear Secretary".

His General Conference activities saw him on several important sub-committees. He had a role in advising on the establishment of the Church Extension Building Fund (1913). In 1922 he chaired the sub-committee given the responsibility to revised the Constitution (the other members were W.H. Hall and F.J. Sivyler). In the years 1926 to 1928 he was part of the working party investigating the establishment of a central building for the movement. In

1938 he convened the Finance Investigative Committee. All this he combined with his working life and being secretary of the Enmore Church.

But there is more. He was also involved in the normal committee structure of Conference. He appears as auditor for the Literature Committee in 1911 and the Temperance Committee in 1919. For sixteen years from 1922 he was Secretary to the Committee known at various stages as the Reference and Credentials Committee, the Credentials Committee and finally the Advisory Board. He also served on the Home Missions Committee (1924 to 1935). His role on the Advisory Board saw some important changes. For example, Hilder reported to the 1931 Conference that

“the Committee is suggesting that it might be relieved of the duty of arranging for preachers to be registered to celebrate marriages, and that this is more a matter for the Conference Executive ...”²⁵

The suggestion was adopted and it has been the case ever since. There was some disquiet about the change of name from Credentials Committee to Advisory Board. Hence the explanation in the 1936 *Conference Handbook*. Hilder wrote:

For many years the Conference has appointed a Reference and Credentials Committee, but at the last revision of the constitution, it was decided to fall in line with the procedure in the other States and adopt the name of Advisory Board, the number being enlarged to seven members.

This was necessary for the Conference Executive had required the committee to investigate and report on three controversial issues²⁶.

When the Centennial Commemoration Conference²⁷ was held in Sydney in 1909 he was, of course, a member of the planning committee along with G.T. Walden, A.E. Illingworth, T.W. Smith, S.G. Griffiths, T. Hagger and J. Stimson. These were leading evangelists and laymen of the young NSW conference. In the end he became responsible for platform supply with Thomas Hagger and A.E. Illingworth; was one of the servers at communion with C.J. Lea, W.D. Lang, A.W. Shearston, A. Price and W.W. Macindoe; and had the role of timekeeper.

Due to his indifferent health, he was compelled to retire from both business and church activities. This was at the beginning of 1938 and he was accorded an official farewell held in the Marrickville Church at which the luminaries of Churches of Christ in NSW spoke.²⁸

Historian and Statistician

G.T. Walden sums up Hilder's role as historian:

Bro. Hilder is also editor for the New South Wales portion of the Australian church history, and is regarded as the historian of Primitive Christianity in New South Wales. His library of data and photographs of the property and the workers in N.S. Wales since the beginning of our work in N.S.W. will be an invaluable asset to our future historians. His work in amassing this data has necessitated months, perhaps even years, of searching among English, American and Australian books, magazines, pamphlets and private correspondence of brethren. All future historians of our N.S. Wales church history must build on the foundation so well and truly laid by Bro. Hilder. He is the *vade mecum* of the history of the Churches of Christ in N.S.W.

This sentiment is supported by a statement in the *Christian Messenger*²⁹ which quotes figures collected by Hilder. It adds the rider that Hilder was "for many years so prominent in our NSW Conference activities."³⁰

He wrote to W.J. Crossman, the Conference Secretary, in August 1939 saying that he had been "fairly revelling in figures lately, in a desire to demonstrate from past records that the Brotherhood is not progressing as it should." The letter was accompanied by five pages of statistical analysis of additions and losses for the 62 years of Conference records. His analysis is penetrating and unsentimental. However, he concludes by saying "our consideration need not be tinged with pessimism all the time however, as there is a cheerful side." He then goes on to outline what that is.

He wrote a number of significant papers. One entitled "The Executive side of the Church" was really a manual for church secretaries. Another, "Efficiency in Service", starts out

"there is no question that the first great need of the Church of our generation is a spiritual overhauling, not a church programme renewal but a genuine Christian renewal."

He argues for consecrated efficiency and an evangelist emphasis. A third paper, "Thinking With Figures", is essentially about home missions work.

When the Marrickville Church celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1942 Hilder sent the then minister, P.E. Thomas, a history of the church together with some statistical analysis. He asks

to be excused for the handwriting (it was small and spidery), but his trusty old typewriter had broken down.

An Assessment

As the dates of some of his pieces of writing show he always maintained an interest in the work of the movement he so dearly loved. He kept an active mind to the end. He died aged 82 on November 9, 1949. His funeral was conducted by the college student at the Hornsby Church, now Principal Air Chaplain Geoff Crossman (rtd.), who felt inadequate to give the eulogy. Instead, three were given by W.J. Crossman, P.E. Thomas and I.A. Paternoster. As the *Australian Christian* reported, these men "... paid eloquent testimony to Mr. Hilder's long record of faithful service."

Geoff Crossman remembers him as a kindly gracious old man. The writer of this piece remembers him in the same way.³¹ However, we should let his dear friend G.T. Walden have the final say:

In carrying out the many duties of a member of these multifarious and conference organisations he has given much time, great ability, and has endeared himself to his associates in the work by his ability, geniality and Christlikeness. . . . Jack Hilder is a modest and retiring man . . . He is one 'who does good by stealth and blushes to find it known.'

He was truly a gracious, godly man and indeed a "good and faithful servant." Both adjectives are applicable to his character and his capacity and Churches of Christ in New South Wales were blessed by his life and ministry.

¹ *The Australian Christian*, vol. 38, November 28, 1935, p. 766. Other qualities referred to in the article will be referenced in this paper.

² The spelling follows that used at the time. *The Australian Christian* favoured Webster's Dictionary.

³ His siblings were Elizabeth (1861-1863), William (born and died 1864), Francis (1865-1868), Minnie (1870-1949), Frederick (1872-1910), Alfred (1876-1954), Richard (born and died 1878) and James (born and died 1879). The fact that the three children born before him did not live beyond three meant that he grew up as the eldest child. Minnie married Thomas E. Rofe who was to become a figure of no little consequence and influence in Churches of Christ, not only in New South Wales, but also throughout the Commonwealth. For an extensive treatment of Rofe see H.E. Hayward, "Strive to Do Well: the Life and Legacy of Thomas Ernest Rofe" in *Historical Digest*, Churches of Christ Historical Society, Issue 176, August 2012.

⁴ Hananiah arrived in December 1854 on the S.S. Siam accompanied by his mother, his father having died in 1841. Margaret arrived in March 1844 on the S.S. William Metcalf accompanied by her parents, two brothers and four sister.

⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 21st April 1860, p. 4.

⁶ Trade & Professional Directory, 1868, page 376.

⁷ An article on Abigail appears in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* which indicates that he went into politics. He was gaoled for five years for "conspiring to issue a false balance sheet with fraudulent intent".

⁸ There is an advertisement for a junior salesman on Tuesday 18th September, 1888, page 12.

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- ⁹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* Friday 22nd March 1878, page 8.
- ¹⁰ *NSW Government Gazette* 1872, page 2328.
- ¹¹ *NSW Government Gazette* 1878, page 4450.
- ¹² *NSW Police Gazette*, 26th Oct., 1881, page 395.
- ¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 3rd October 1884, p.7.
- ¹⁴ *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 14th January 1902 records his admission to the Public Accountants' Students' Society. The 1919 Conference Handbook of Churches of Christ in New South Wales gives his qualifications as AFIA (Associate of the Federal Institute of Accountants). The 1930 Census refers to him as Hilder, Edwin John, Gower Street, Hurlstone Park, accountant.
- ¹⁵ Cycling: *Sydney Morning Herald* 30th July 1888, 13th May 1889; Athletics: 21st May 1889, 23rd September 1889 et al.
- ¹⁶ *The Newtown Project*, shows they lived at 89 Crow Lane and at 4 Belmore Street, on the South side, which was located between London and Phillip Streets. According to the 1905 Electoral Role they were living in Fletcher Street, Marrickville. Later they moved to 12 Gower Street, Hurlstone Park. He lived there until 1939 when he moved to Kenmore, near Goulburn.
- ¹⁷ His parents lived in Great Buckingham Street, Redfern.
- ¹⁸ The letterhead of the Enmore church at that time gives the Enmore church secretary's address as an office in Bardsley and Company's building in Bathurst Street, Sydney.
- ¹⁹ *The Australian Christian*, vol. 38, November 28, 1935, p. 766.
- ²⁰ *Marrickville Minute Book* 21st January 1912.
- ²¹ *Marrickville Monthly Budget*, December 1935 and April 1936.
- ²² *Marrickville Monthly Budget*, June 1937.
- ²³ The author of this paper remembers reading from it in church services 20 years after it was donated.
- ²⁴ E.J. Hilder, "Sixty Years of Brotherhood Work" in the *Diamond Jubilee Conference Handbook*, March 1945, pp. 19-34.
- ²⁵ *Christian Messenger*, 20th May 1931, page 12.
- ²⁶ *NSW Churches of Christ Conference Handbook for 1936*, p.22. The issue was preacher placement and the three areas were (a) the advantages of substituting preacher placement for the present method of calling and discharging preachers; (b) the probation and oversight of College (Glen Iris) graduates and other new men seeking engagement as preachers; and (c) the development of the circuit system for the benefit of new and smaller churches, with an experienced ministers in charge of the circuit assisted by one or more younger men. None of these were implemented.
- ²⁷ The Conference was the commemorated the centenary of the *Declaration and Address*, the defining document of the Restoration Movement. It was held in conjunction with the Federal Conference.
- ²⁸ An account of this farewell can be found in the *Christian Messenger* 1st February 1938, pp. 5 and 9.
- ²⁹ Volume XVI. No. 9, February 1, 1939.
- ³⁰ The writer, who is the current Historian for Churches of Christ in NSW, agrees wholeheartedly.
- ³¹ Hilder was a friend of the author's grandfather and father. They worked together in Conference and the church at Marrickville.