

**‘HOLY CITY’:
THE BRETHREN COMMUNITY AT
KYNETON, 1900–1911¹**

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The presence of a religious community at Kyneton, familiar to contemporaries as ‘Holy City’, has long been known about but not previously described in depth. This essay aims to clarify the details of its existence by examining its membership, the religious faith that was common to them and the routines that occupied their daily lives. Particular attention is given to the development of the negative attitudes displayed by the local populace. The sudden termination of the commune is examined in relation to the beliefs they adhered to in the face of legislation they could not conscientiously accept. The departure of the communards, the tragic death of their leader and the eventual fate of the others is described, followed by concluding remarks about the place of the community within Australian communal and religious history.

On 12 September 1900 a party of sixteen people (including five children) arrived in Melbourne by the ship *Nineveh*, having embarked at Plymouth on 31 July. Their leader was Arthur John Wilson Dalzell. Within a few days the party travelled to Kyneton, a township of 3,200 people, eighty kilometres north-west of Melbourne, the centre of a mining and agricultural district. By 20 September a farm of thirty hectares had been purchased (a further sixteen hectares were added in October) and alterations to the existing house thereon were under way two days later. Plans for two more houses to be built on the same property to accommodate later arrivals were already being drawn up. The new community (the term employed by the *Kyneton Guardian*) was considered a worthy addition to the local population because it

1. This article was first published in the *Victorian Historical Journal* (June 2008) and is reproduced here by kind permission. Some new material, provided by Timothy Stunt, is to be found in footnotes 14, 15 and 16.

was composed of people ‘of more than average intelligence, of unexceptional character, and possessed of means’. The reporter hoped that the town would extend to them a ‘hearty welcome’.²

The community settled to the east of the township, about two kilometres from the Post Office, on the Three Chain Road (now known as Trio Road) within the (civil) parish of Carlsruhe. The bond uniting them was a faith that placed emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ and rejected most ecclesiastical and denominational labels; the sharing of resources, social life and living space (though present) seems to have been a secondary consideration. Robert Fogarty describes such groups as ‘charismatic perfectionists’, those that operated within a millennialist tradition. ‘Their concern for social questions was always secondary to an emphasis on the personal and religious development of the members as outlined by an inspired leader.’³

The journey had created ties that helped cement their communal life and strengthened the belief that they possessed the truth. The move ‘signified new beginning, new hope and a rejection of the past’.⁴ Cocooned in their separateness, the community became the target of local gossip, so that legends and half-truths circulated about their behaviour: there were rumours relating to voting at the conscription plebiscites of 1916 and 1917 (conducted well after the community had departed), that they practised polygamy similar to the Mormons, and that they participated in unusual religious rites.⁵ In February 1902 the *Kyneton Observer* named the community ‘Holy City’ (the epithet became a commonly used and persistent label) and

2. *Kyneton Guardian*, 22 September 1900 [hereafter *Guardian*]; *Kyneton Observer*, 20 September, 25 October 1900.

3. Robert S. Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements 1860–1914* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990, p. 16.

4. Fogarty, *All Things New*, p. 20.

5. Naomi Ansell, ‘The Holy City’ (typescript 1980, retyped 1989) held by the Kyneton Historical Society Inc. [hereafter Ansell Notes]. I have to thank Clare McKenna, formerly research officer of the society, for making a copy of these notes available for my use. Naomi Ansell, née Stirling (1911–2002), the youngest daughter of William Stirling and Grace Crathern, though born shortly after the demise of the community, would have gleaned details from her parents.

thought its members displayed a ‘holier than you’ attitude. The criticisms were based on a misunderstanding of differences within the family that surfaced at the funeral of Margaret Seyler and were later entirely retracted. But the damage had been done and such attitudes seemingly became those prevalent throughout the Kyneton district.⁶ Closer examination of the limited evidence that is available allows us to create a more balanced narrative of the life of this commune.

The initial party that carried out the foundation work consisted of nine adults, two teenagers and five children under the age of 10.⁷ The leader, Arthur Dalzell (aged 44), was accompanied by his wife Janet (née Wilson, 33) and five of their children (the eldest 8 years old; a further five were born at Kyneton 1901-1907). To assist with the management of this large and growing family, the Dalzell’s employed Miss F. Hyde (26) as a nurse and Miss M.A. Young (29) as a cook—whether they were treated purely as servants or also participated in the shared activities of the community is not known. Six other females were participants in the venture: Mrs A. Jackson (58) and her 15-year-old daughter; Mrs Amy Coke (56) and her 17-year-old daughter; Miss Grace Crathern (21); and Miss M.G. Wilson (32), probably an unmarried sister of Janet Dalzell. Only one other adult male had arrived with the foundation party, William Hockin Stirling (35), mentioned by the *Guardian* in terms suggesting he was Dalzell’s lieutenant. He was to marry Grace Crathern early in 1901 and five of their six children were born during their life in the community.⁸

The membership of the community was boosted by the arrival in November of James Arthur Seyler (49), his wife Margaret (50) and

6. *Kyneton Observer*, 24 April, 29 April and 1 May 1902. It is significant that Naomi Ansell titled her brief notes on the community ‘The Holy City’.

7. Details of the first party drawn from PROV, VPRS 1148, Inward Passenger Lists, *Nineveh*, arrived 12 September 1900. The ages of the passengers are drawn from this list and, in the absence of formal birth or death certificates, are used to calculate birth dates, or age at the time of other events. However, where available, dates available from the *Victorian Edwardian Index 1902–1913: Indexes to Births, Deaths and Marriages in Victoria* [CD-ROM] are preferred.

8. The imbalance between males and single (or widowed) females was clearly obvious and gave rise to the unsubstantiated rumours of polygamy or Mormonism.

their 6 children (ranging in age from 8 to 18); a spinster sister of Seyler's (Evelina? 55) completed this second group of 9 settlers.⁹ The membership was completed with the arrival of Albert C. Knapp (single, 39) in August 1903.¹⁰ At its inception, then, the commune numbered twenty-five souls, although this fluctuated as Janet Dalzell and Grace Stirling gave birth to five children each during the life of the commune, whilst there were four deaths and some departures of the Seyler sons; at its largest there were thirty-four members (including infants) in 1908.

It was a diverse party that gathered for the journey to a new home. Ranging in age from 21 to 58, it included: Dalzell, a qualified medical practitioner; Stirling, an Oxford graduate and the son of an Anglican minister; two middle-aged mothers accompanied by teenage daughters (were the husbands dead?); and the unmarried sister of Janet Dalzell. James Seyler, described as a farmer, and Albert Knapp (clerk) appear to be the least prosperous of the group. Little more detail is available about most members of the community. That all of the Nineveh passengers had embarked at Plymouth is suggestive of the religious faith they professed, but it may just have been a matter of convenience in relation to securing berths on the ship.

Of the leader, Arthur Dalzell, we can say more. Family details are lacking, but the date of his birth can be calculated as about 1856. He graduated M.B., C.M. from Edinburgh University in 1888 (note the unusually mature age (32) of his graduation) and practised in Edinburgh during 1889 and Great Malvern, Worcester, from 1890 until 1891. For the following three years his whereabouts is not listed and it is probably during this time that he was married (his wife was from Glasgow), his first child was born and he travelled overseas,

9. PROV, VPRS 1148, Inward Passenger Lists, *Afric*, arrived 8 November 1900.

10. PROV, VPRS 1148, Inward Passenger Lists, *Runic*, arrived 27 August 1903. Ansell Notes, mentions the 'Birch' and McLennan families (alternatively 'McLellan') from Swan Hill as later arrivals at the commune. She seems to be confusing 'Birch' with Alice M. Burch who married Harold Seyler (third son of James) in 1910 and moved from the settlement. Duncan McLennan (grocer) and Miss Elsie McLennan (music teacher) perhaps associated with members of the commune but were never part of it; Duncan had established his business in Kyneton at least by 1898.

possibly to Kyneton.¹¹ From 1895 to 1898 he was based on the Isle of Wight and then at Tunbridge Wells, Kent, during 1899–1900, whence he migrated to Kyneton.¹² The *Guardian* suggested that Dalzell was ‘possessed of means’, and this is borne out by the fact that he had ‘retired from active work’ as a doctor (although only 44) yet was able to pay £750 for the property on which the community was established. Whether his ‘means’ were acquired from his family is unknown. It may be that his wife brought money into the marriage, for Miss M.G. Wilson (probably an unmarried sister of Janet Dalzell) purchased an adjoining 16 hectares for £725 to add to the land already bought by Arthur Dalzell.¹³

The one other member of the community singled out for mention by the *Guardian* was William Hockin Stirling, like Dalzell ‘much devoted to the study of the Scriptures’. His grandfather, Captain Thomas Stirling RN (1792-1876), was born in Jamaica, but in 1825 married Anna Hockin of from Dartmouth where Charles (William Hockin Stirling’s his father), was born in 1827.¹⁴ Like his younger

11. The *Guardian*, 22 September 1900, claimed that ‘about ten years ago’ Dalzell visited Victoria and was ‘much charmed’ with Kyneton; thus, the move there in 1900 was not into entirely unknown territory. I have been unable to trace a mention of this visit in the *Guardian*. That paper also claimed that an uncle of Dalzell’s was George Cowie Morrison, a Congregational minister, who had migrated to Victoria in 1855 (arrived 2 September) and was almost immediately appointed to the vacant pastorate at Kyneton. After little more than twelve months in office he died of a heart condition on 5 January 1857 (*Congregational Year Book 1858*, London, Congregational Union, 1858, p. 218). This family association may be the reason for the visit to Kyneton, although Dalzell may not have been born before his uncle left for Victoria.

12. Details of Dalzell’s qualifications and practices are from the annual *Medical Directory*, London, Churchill, 1889–1902.

13. *Guardian*, 22 September 1900; *Kyneton Observer*, 20 September, 25 October 1900; this paper incorrectly names the purchaser of the additional land as *Mr* M.G. Wilson.

14. *Guardian*, 22 September 1900. Charles Stirling matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, in January 1845 and graduated BA 1849, MA 1865. A second son, Waite Hockin Stirling, born 1829, also attended Exeter College, BA 1851, entered the church (priest 1853) and eventually became the first Bishop of the Falkland Islands in 1869, retiring in 1900; he died at London, 19 November 1923, aged 94. Family details from Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses ... 1714–1886*, (Oxford, James

brother Waite, Charles entered the church (priest 1852), serving at Hadlow, Kent, and, later, Reading, Berkshire, where he became master of a private school and an occasional preacher in the neighbourhood for nine years (1855–64). In 1864 he married Mary Turner and in the following year moved to New Malden (Surrey) where he served from 1865 until at least 1892, when he resigned from the parish.¹⁵

It was at New Malden that his sons were born: Charles Goodbarne (about 1867) and William Hockin (about 1869).¹⁶ Their father's evangelical sympathies are reflected in his having enrolled William as a student at the newly founded boarding school in Somerset, Monkton Combe, though his son's subsequent matriculation and graduation in 1890 from Oriel College is stranger, as that had been the college of Tractarians like Hurrell Froude and John Henry Newman, and William's father was becoming increasingly alarmed at what he perceived as the growing influence of Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism within the Anglican Church. He resorted to print to express his views, starting with *Words of Warning* in 1870 and *The Eastern Question in the Light of Prophecy* (1876). But it was after his departure from New Malden that he became most outspoken, titles such as *The Crisis in the Church, or, Popery in the Prayer Book* (which appeared in at least three editions by 1903) indicating the

Parker, 1891), vol. 4; Fredrick Lowndes, *Bishops of the Day: a Biographical Dictionary* (London, Grant Richards, 1897); *The Times*, 20 November 1923 (obituary); International Genealogical Index [IGI] and Alan Macfarlane's ancestral website on [<http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/MAC/aqwg06.htm#100>]).

15. Details of his marriage in Exeter Cathedral are from *Gentleman's Magazine* NS xvii (Aug. 1864) p. 235, Details from *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, London, Cox, 1865–1892; no entries appear after 1892, although his pamphlets continued to be published until 1914. Cf New Malden's web-site [http://www.ourkt3.com/home/all_gas_and_gaiters_life_in_new_malden_in_1867] Ansell Notes claims he resigned the parish 'because of the tendency towards Romanism.'

16. C.L. Shadwell, *Registrum Oriense* ii (London [Frowde] 1902) 652. His brother Charles matriculated at Exeter College in October 1885; *Alumni Oxonienses*.

thrust of his arguments.¹⁷ It was in this increasingly strident Protestant atmosphere that William Hockin was born and educated.

The thread common to all the communards was their acceptance of the teaching of Benjamin Wills Newton (1807–99). Newton had left the Anglican Church and adopted a restorationist theology that attempted to recapture the primitive apostolic past and reflected a consuming interest in prophecy as well as a hermeneutic of biblical literalism. He was born at Devonport, near Plymouth, and studied at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was fellow 1826–32; he had completed his B.A. in 1829 with first-class honours. In 1830, at Oxford, he met J.N. Darby (1800–82) whom he persuaded to join him at the Providence Chapel in Raleigh Street, Plymouth. Soon after he abandoned the idea of taking holy orders and instead worked with Darby in developing the Brethren principle of Christians meeting in brotherhood with no formal creed or doctrinal tests other than faith in Christ.¹⁸ Ecclesiology was centred on a weekly communion, hymn singing and prayer under the direction of elders, chosen through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Under Newton's leadership the Plymouth assembly grew to between eight hundred and a thousand souls, so that larger premises were secured at Ebrington Street in 1840, where Newton remained as elder until 1847. There was, however, growing tension between the two Brethren luminaries, manifested in differences over arrangements for selecting leaders within the assemblies (Darby sought an 'impulsive ministry' while Newton favoured a 'stated ministry' of those with the gift of oversight), difficulties in maintaining relations between assemblies and diverging interpretations of prophecy.

17. In a pamphlet of 1914, a review of the recently published *England's Fight with the Papacy*, by Walter Walsh, Stirling spoke of the 'Harlot Church', the threatened 'destruction of the Protestant religion' and his fear that the churches were being 'turned into Mass Houses'. A copy of *England's fight with the Papacy, reviewed by Rev. Charles Stirling MA* (London, Imperial Protestant Federation, [1914]) is held by the State Library of Victoria.

18. These details and the following outline are based on Jonathan D. Burnham, *A Story of Conflict: the Controversial Relationship Between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 2004.

Newton first abandoned his reticence in 1840 in *Five Letters on Events Predicted in Scripture* (originally circulated as manuscript copies) in which he rejected Darby's 'Jewish interpretation' of the Gospels so that sections of the New Testament applied only to a Jewish remnant left after the 'secret rapture' of the saints.

By 1843 Darby had returned from one of his frequent overseas visits and became convinced that Plymouth was heading towards an official clergy; Newton, he felt, had the sole object of teaching 'differently from what the brethren taught, no matter what, so that it set their teaching aside'.¹⁹ It seems that Newton had assumed increasingly autocratic control over the Plymouth meetings so that some of the congregation felt that liberty of the Spirit was being restricted by the reappearance of clerical order.²⁰

At the same time Darby was moving towards the centralisation of church government, especially in relation to the admission of an individual to communion so that the ideal of the church as 'One Body' was not jeopardised. Thus there developed a division between those who sacrificed hierarchy to realise a genuine fellowship (the Open Brethren) and those who accepted the personal domination of Darby who withdrew blessing from those who erred.

Ultimately, after a bitter pamphlet war, Darby withdrew from Ebrington Street in October 1845, claiming that Newton and his followers were motivated by Satan. By December he established his own congregation at Raleigh Street because he felt that 'clericalism and worldly principles had usurped the place of the Spirit of God'.²¹ The seceders led by Darby became known as 'Exclusives' and travelled their own path, adopting the practice of 'separation from

19. Quoted in Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*, Denver, Colo., W.F. Knapp, 1936, p. 190; details from Burnham, pp. 155–9, 167.

20. The details of the split between Darby and Newton draw on the thesis of Peter L. Embley, 'The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren', St Paul's College, Cheltenham, U.K., 1966.

<<http://www.bruederbewegung.de/pdf/embley.pdf>>

21. Noel, *History*, p. 192; Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p. 175.

evil as God's principle of unity'.²² This involved (and still does) a severe regime of disengagement from the world at large,

Newton later left Ebrington Street, December 1847, as a result of his departure from traditional orthodoxy in a lecture in which he suggested that Christ's suffering only on the Cross was vicarious and atoning whilst his other sufferings were non-atoning. Many Brethren considered Newton's retraction in November insufficient and worthless, withdrawing their support. He settled in Cornwall before moving to Victoria Grove Terrace, Bayswater, about 1850. The Newtonian assembly moved to a smaller building in Compton Street, where Newton preached intermittently in the early 1850s; later he preached at the Duke Street Chapel at St James Park.²³

In about 1860, he established an independent congregation at Queen's Road, Bayswater, London. Newton was both owner and patriarch of the iron chapel, allowing no others to speak at services on Sundays, nor at the prophetic lectures delivered on Mondays at 11a.m. A journalist, C.M. Davies, described the congregation at one of these lectures as similar to that 'attracted to a fashionable marriage'.²⁴ Davies supplies no details of the rites used by Newton, instead devoting most space to describing one of Newton's prophetic lectures and outlining three of the main differences that divided Newton and Darby. Newton accepted the first eighteen of the Thirty-nine Articles of the English Church (which deal with the basic doctrines of the Trinity, the resurrection, the scriptural canon, original sin, good works, the church as a congregation of the faithful and the validity of the three creeds). Second, Newton's system of church governance called for the independence of each congregation but with a definite leader or 'stated ministry'. The passion for strong leadership went even further, to the point that constitutional monarchy was rejected and divine right of kings was lauded in a way 'that would have delighted the heart of a Stuart'. Democratic self-will was

22. Philip Schaff, *Religious Encyclopaedia* (Edinburgh, Clark, 1884), p. 1,858.

23. Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p. 213.

24. C. Maurice Davies, *Unorthodox London; or, Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis*, 3rd ed., London, Tinsley Brothers, 1975, pp. 183-91. First published in 1873.

an instrument of Antichrist and no true Christian would serve in such a government. Finally, Newton rejected Darby's doctrine of the rapture and the secret Second Coming. This, Newton insisted, would be preceded by certain events, wars, rumours of wars, signs in heaven and other portents, the separation of believers and unbelievers at the end time (as illustrated in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Matt. 13:24-30), the distinction between those who rise at the first resurrection ('the first-born ones') and the saints who live during the millennium itself. Newton considered such scripture warned Christians to prepare themselves for the 'great tribulation' through which the church would have to pass.²⁵

It was beliefs such as these, then, that the members of 'Holy City' brought with them to Kyneton. It is apparent that many of them became associated with Newton after his move, early in 1870, from London to Tunbridge Wells; the chapel at Bayswater was sold in 1874. By August 1873 he had moved to the Isle of Wight, then, about 1882, to Orpington, Kent, before returning to the island in 1892. Here Newton served as the director of a Sunday School and built a small chapel in which he delivered public lectures. Newton and his wife remained on the island until August 1898, when they returned to Tunbridge Wells; there he died, 'June 26, 1899. 1a.m. aged 91. At 2 Clanricarde Gardens, Tunbridge Wells. As he wished—alone'.²⁶

This inscription, by Mary Stirling, gives us a clue to the origins of the party that migrated to Kyneton in 1900. The Stirlings were close to Newton in their shared beliefs and as friends. William Hockin Stirling was tutored during the 1880s by Newton for his Oxford degree and was left a legacy that helped towards his fares to

25. These ideas are developed in Benjamin Newton, *Expository Teaching on the Millennium and Israel's Future* (London, Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1913), pp. 19, 38. This work is a collection of previously published pamphlets, occasional papers and articles from the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*. Indicative of his teaching on the rapture is the pamphlet, *The Second Coming of our Lord not Secret but in Manifest Glory*, London, 1862.

26. Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, pp. 216–8; 230–1. Quotation is from a note by Mrs Mary E. Stirling (wife of Rev. Charles Stirling) writing of 'Our beloved and revered friend'.

Australia.²⁷ Arthur Dalzell was practising on the Isle of Wight from 1895 to 1898 and then at Tunbridge Wells, 1899 to 1900; it would seem most likely that he was exposed to Newton's teachings at both those locations. This association became a particularly close one; during Newton's last days Dalzell 'sat by his bedside holding his hand'.²⁸ Grace Crathern established her connection with Newton on the Isle of Wight in 1896. In March of that year her father, William Luke Crathern, came as an invalid to a home at Ryde where Nonconformist ministers were cared for. On 24 March he was involved in a discussion with Newton (in company with F.W. Wyatt) but not long after returned to Devonshire, where he died on 29 May.²⁹ The links established by the Seyler family, Albert Knapp and the two unaccompanied women (Mrs Jackson, Mrs Coke) are unknown.

As befitted their beliefs, the party migrated to avoid the 'yet to be revived Roman Empire', the ten-nation confederacy from the west that would be headed by an Antichrist and eventually meet armies from the north (led by Russia) and the east at Armageddon. Newton had made it clear that Britain must eventually join that federation and share 'the doom of that Beast whose "body" is to be given to "the burning flame"'.³⁰ Far from the threatening international scene in Europe and the Near East, these 'quiet, unoffending residents' (as they were later to be described) could continue uninterrupted with

27. *Watching and Waiting*, July/Aug. 1961; Jan/March 2003. Stirling died in Melbourne, 5 May 1961. I wish to thank Stephen Toms, Secretary, Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, for providing these (and other) references from *Watching and Waiting*.

28. Dalzell to Col. Walkley, 5 June 1899 (Fry MS, p.443, Christian Brethren Archive 7049, John Rylands University Library, Manchester). I have to thank Timothy Stunt for this reference.

29. F.W. Wyatt, Notebook, vol. vii (Christian Brethren Archive 7061); the discussion with Newton is summarised in the Fry MS, pp. 269–78. I have to again thank Timothy Stunt for these references. Crathern had been a Baptist pastor at Holyhead for four years and at Appledore and Westward Ho! for eight years (*Baptist Handbook for 1897*, London, Alexander and Shepherd, 1897, p. 165). Grace would have been about 16 at the time of his death.

30. Ansell Notes; Newton, *Expository Teaching on the Millennium*, p. 57.

their study of scriptural prophecy.³¹ The move may even have been suggested by Newton shortly prior to his death.³²

Details of the communal life adopted at the settlement can only be surmised. Comprising forty-six hectares, the property allowed for agricultural activities that ensured sustenance and perhaps income. James Seyler was a farmer, and William Stirling was so described in Wise's *Victoria Post Office Directory*, despite his Oxford qualifications and apparent lack of rural experience. The Seyler children (Cecil, 18; Sydney, 16; Harold, 14; and William, 13) were old enough to be considered labourers, and they may have been joined by the three oldest of Dalzell's sons as they matured.³³ It is unknown if the property was owned communally or if any produce was regarded similarly.

What is certain is that Biblical and prophetic studies received considerable attention. This is illustrated by a four-page tract, *Supernatural Power: Whence is it?*³⁴ Signed by Dalzell, Stirling and Seyler, its purpose was to 'utter a solemn warning against such works of the Devil as:—Spiritualism, Hypnotism, Animal Magnetism, Mesmerism, Will-power, Faith-healing (so called), Cataleptic-trances, Clairvoyance, Thought-reading, Fortune-telling, Palmistry, Conjuring, Magic, &c'. Practices such as these had to be resisted, as those who

31. *Guardian*, 11 April 1911. The reporter suggested that one of the main activities of the community was the preparation of a new translation of the scriptures.

32. There is at least a hint of planning for the venture. Given the apparent ease with which property was acquired only days after arrival in Kyneton, and the alacrity with which building alterations were commenced and plans for new residences were drawn-up, it is likely that some correspondence had been sent to local business people (or local relatives?) seeking information or announcing the intention to migrate. The suggestion by Ansell that the commune was prophesied in *Perilous Times* (a magazine in the Brethren interest) is unlikely as this periodical did not commence publication until after 1900.

33. *Kyneton Observer*, 26 April 1911. Entries for Stirling appear in the *Victoria Post Office Directory*, Melbourne, Wise, 1903–1911; other details drawn from Inward Passenger Lists.

34. *Supernatural Power: Whence is it?* (Kyneton, *Observer Office*, W.R. McConnell, Printer, n.d.). I have to thank Graham Johnson, Christian Brethren Archivist, John Rylands University Library, for providing a photocopy for my use. The item is annotated 'Corrected copy' and appears to be page proofs awaiting printing.

used them, especially mediums, linked those who witnessed them 'with Hell and the fire that never shall be quenched'. It is from darkness such as this that one could be delivered through faith. Biblical examples of the dangers of divination and similar powers were noted (Acts 16:16, Mark 5:3–4) but, true to Newton's teaching, Article XI of the Book of Common Prayer was cited to stress that it is by faith 'we are accounted righteous before God'. It is unknown if any special occurrence prompted the preparation of the tract; one assumes that it was distributed to Kyneton residents and perhaps elsewhere.

The settlers occupied at least four buildings. The Seyler family occupied a residence in Bourke Street (that section of Trio Road nearest to the township), whilst Amy Coke resided at 'Grey Cottage', presumably with her daughter and, perhaps, the Jacksons.³⁵ The Stirlings lived at 'Halliday' and may have shared this house with other members until 'Grey Cottage' was constructed.³⁶ Finally there was 'Ermstowe', Dalzell's residence, reputedly extended (only a week after the arrival of the party) to consist of sixteen rooms. It had been built by Mr West, a previous owner of the property. The large size of the house was obviously necessary to accommodate the growing Dalzell family, but it may also have served as a communal centre for prayers and prophetic exposition.³⁷

It was in this setting that the communards went about their daily routines, pursuing what the *Guardian* called the 'even tenour [*sic*] of their way'.³⁸ Their numbers increased as the Dalzell and Stirling

35. The Seyler residence and 'Grey Cottage' were perhaps the two new houses 'awaiting construction' after the purchase of the farm; *Guardian*, 22 September 1900.

36. Possibly the name given to the house on 'Halliday's Paddock' originally called 'Viewbank' and owned by J.G. Halliday, situated on Crown Allotment 30, Parish of Carlsruhe; *Guardian*, 4 December 1882. In 1911 the Stirling's address was given as Black Hill, a name still applied to Batters Lane on some maps; later still (1928–1949) the land became part of the golf links before the club moved to its current site; Ansell Notes.

37. I have found no contemporary evidence for the name 'Ermstowe' or the number of its rooms. This detail is given by L.J. Blake, 'Village settlements', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. 37 (1966), p. 199.

38. *Guardian*, 30 March 1911.

families grew, but the peace was punctuated by a number of deaths—Margaret Seyler (aged 52) in February 1902 from consumption; her sons Sydney (aged 20) in 1904 and Norris (aged 15) in 1907; and Janet Dalzell in July 1909 (aged 42) as the result of complications during the birth of her eleventh child (she and her infant daughter were buried at Karlsruhe cemetery). Arthur Dalzell was now solely responsible for a family of ten, the oldest 18, the youngest 2.³⁹

The ultimate test for their faith came in 1911, the source of that test being legislation recently introduced by both Commonwealth and state governments. First was the introduction of compulsory military training, the result of amendments to the Defence Act introduced in 1910. Compulsory training was to come into operation on 1 January 1911 and was to consist of three levels: boys who turned 12 or 13 that year were to join the junior cadets, which operated within the school system; 14 to 18-year-olds joined the senior cadets and were to register for training; and 18 to 26-year-olds were enrolled in the Citizen Military Forces. No provision was made for the exemption of conscientious objectors, although the regulations suggested that they might be assigned non-combatant duties.⁴⁰ The *Guardian* indicated that the sect members ‘state privately’ that they could not remain in a country where they were forced by law to bring up their children as ‘men of blood’.⁴¹

However, it was the provisions of the Victorian Electoral Act 1910 that were to prove the more decisive in determining the response of the community. The act altered the method by which an elector enrolled to vote, the Voter’s Right (for which one applied, or ignored, as one saw fit) being replaced by a system of registration and

39. *Guardian*, 24 April 1902, 8 July 1909. Other details on the Seyler family gathered from the *Victorian Edwardian Index 1902–1913* [CD-ROM]

40. *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 174–5. The *Guardian*, 2 February 1911, provides a warning for locals to register before the closing date. The regulations as they stood in 1911 would have applied to three Dalzell boys (senior cadets) and two of Seyler’s sons (Citizen Military Forces).

41. *Guardian*, 11 April 1911; the phrase is presumably quoted after speaking with a member of the community.

eventual listing on an electoral roll. The basis for the new (and future) rolls was to be an electoral canvas, requiring every occupier of a dwelling to fill in details of those over 21 years of age residing at that address; refusal to supply the particulars would incur a penalty of £5.⁴² Schedules were properly delivered to Dalzell at East Kyneton, Seyler at Bourke Street and Stirling at Black Hill, near Kyneton, but when the constable collected them on 29 March 1911 he was handed blank schedules together with letters of explanation from Dalzell (dated 23 March), Seyler (25 March) and Stirling (28 March); a fourth letter from Amy Coke is simply dated March.⁴³

Dalzell's response is indicative of the tone of all replies (Seyler's letter is a word-for-word copy of that of Dalzell). The act, he explains, is 'contrary to the Laws of Christ' and is based on principles 'other than those of Christ' in that it suggests that the power of legislators 'comes from the people instead of from God'. He indicates that he would readily obey any laws so long as they are not forbidden by Scripture, but, by enrolling to vote, 'I should be virtually subscribing my name to the principles God abhors'. Stirling expressed the opinion that 'governors are set up to rule and not be ruled by the people' and looked to Christ's return as the time for the destruction of 'all the apostate governments of earth'. Newton would have agreed unreservedly with such a stance. Only Seyler, in a short afterthought (a note of 27 March) to his main letter, expresses his rejection of the recently introduced military training. All of them were clearly expressing Newton's principle of separation: as they were 'gathered out' to await the return of Christ they could ignore all calls to participate in the political process and thus abstain from voting.⁴⁴

The day after these replies had been collected, and forwarded to Melbourne for the chief secretary to advise on a course of action, the

42. Victoria, *Electoral Law Amendment Act 1910* (no. 2288), sections 15, 17. The householder's schedules were to be distributed and collected by the police; PROV, VA 475, Chief Secretary's Dept., VPRS 3992, Inwards Registered Correspondence, Unit 1183, Item 105.

43. PROV, VA 475, Chief Secretary's Dept., VPRS 3992, Inwards Registered Correspondence, Unit 1188, Item 3156.

44. Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p. 140.

Guardian reported on the refusal to complete the schedules and noted the rumour that the community would soon be abandoned.⁴⁵ The *Age* repeated the story the next day and quoted passages from Dalzell's letter, thus indicating it had seen the file.⁴⁶ By April 6 the police had visited the settlement for a second time and reported that two members were leaving on the 10th (incorrectly identified as Dalzell and Amy Coke) and the others would follow by the end of the month. The acting premier, W.A. Watt, minuted the file on April 10 that there was now no purpose in prosecuting, and the party should be allowed to leave.

The communards responded swiftly to the changes suddenly thrust upon them. On the day following Watt's decision not to press charges, the *Guardian* reported that during the previous few weeks the group had already begun disposing of its furniture and effects and was making preparations to sail to Port Said and eventually settle at Jerusalem. It regretted that they were so uncompromising in their attitude against 'the laws of a community under the British flag that they prefer to reside under the rule of the Turk'.⁴⁷ The life of 'Holy City' came to an abrupt end when twenty members from the settlement departed on the *Papanui*, 22 April 1911.⁴⁸

The party consisted of Dalzell, his ten children, their nurse and the cook, together with his sister-in-law (Miss Wilson), the Cokes, the Jacksons, James Seyler and Albert Knapp. Of the original arrivals in 1900 only Stirling and his wife, Grace, pregnant with her last child, remained in the Kyneton district; one of Seyler's sons, Harold, had

45 *Guardian*, 30 March 1911. Did the rumour come from Seyler (the only one to mention leaving the country in his note of 27 March) or had the police revealed the correspondence to the press?

46 *Age*, 1 April 1911; the *Argus*, 3 April also notes the details of the case. Both papers report on April 7 of the possibility of prosecution.

47. *Guardian*, 11 April 1911.

48. PROV, VPRS 3506, Register of Outward Passengers, *Papanui*, departed 22 April 1911. The *Age* and the *Argus* both reported the departure, 24 April 1911.

married in 1910 and moved elsewhere, possibly to be joined by his three surviving brothers, by now young adults.⁴⁹

The winding-up of the community was carried out speedily. Only a few weeks had elapsed between the delivery of the electoral schedules, the responses of the householders and the suggestion in the *Guardian* that the settlers were to leave for Jerusalem; by late April the party had sailed. Apparently a precipitate departure, this second journey seems to have been undertaken because of scriptural promptings.⁵⁰ This, however, required careful, thoughtful reading of the 'signs of the times', which might indicate the approaching end but such reading was a process fraught with the danger of selecting dates and times that did not produce the expected result, ending only in bitter disappointment. It was far better to face the 'perpetual tension' of expecting Christ at any time and yet obey the command to 'occupy till I come' (Luke 19:13) in case the coming was delayed. It is quite possible that the travellers went in the expectation of being on hand when Christ returned to destroy the armies assembled at Armageddon, gather the saints and initiate the millennial kingdom. Then, surely, might they 'put on their garments of resurrection-glorify and join their brethren, "the Church of the first-born ones" who have preceded them'.⁵¹ But it is also possible that they were merely engaged in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to visit those sites familiar to them from their Biblical studies, before returning to England.⁵²

49. Perhaps Stirling was the sole member of the community who had doubts about the journey to Jerusalem. Seyler's unmarried sister may have been that Evelina Seyler who is recorded as having died at Ballarat, Victoria, in 1916; Harold (and perhaps his brothers) moved to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, sometime after the birth of his daughter, Grace, in 1916. Ansell Notes, records corresponding with her at a later date.

50. Darby and Newton both rejected visions, speaking in tongues and other expressions of the outpouring of the Spirit. Newton had indicated his stance early in his Plymouth days in *Extracts from a Narrative of Facts Characterising the Spiritual Manifestations in Members of Mr Irving's Congregation* (London, 1836).

51. Newton, 'The Millennium and the Everlasting State', in *Expository Teaching on the Millennium*, p. 38.

52. Ansell makes this suggestion, which implies that there had been an incorrect reading of the signs that prompted the journey to Kyneton in the first place.

As events turned out, an ending was at hand, though certainly not that which was expected. Just out of Port Phillip, mechanical problems forced the *Papanui* to stop for two days at Portland; later in the voyage her boilers were leaking so badly that she was forced to put in at Perim Island at the very entrance to the Red Sea.⁵³ Port Said was eventually safely reached on 7 June. On arrival at Jerusalem, illness struck several of the Dalzell family. Two of the younger children fell ill with malarial fever and measles. Just as they began to recover their eldest brother, then aged about 19, and Miss Hyde, their nurse, were hospitalised, probably at the English Mission Hospital. Whilst they were in hospital, Arthur Dalzell died on 8 August, perhaps from typhoid fever. In a letter dated 18 August, sent to those remaining in Kyneton (the Stirlings?) the unnamed female correspondent (Amy Coke? Mrs Jackson?) wrote ‘that great sorrow had come upon them’ because of Dalzell’s death and, though unsure of what was to be done, she was certain that ‘God will rule over them for the best’.⁵⁴ The immediate fate of the party is unknown, though they eventually left Palestine to start new lives elsewhere—the Jacksons to Cairo, later to Cyprus; Amy Coke to Cyprus, her daughter to South Africa; the Dalzells to England; the fate of James Seyler and Albert Knapp is unknown.⁵⁵ The Stirlings remained in the Kyneton district for some time but, by 1916, had moved to a new farm, ‘West View’, some eight kilometres to the north of Kyneton and outside a designated military training centre. This exempted their

53. The *Papanui* was an ill-fated vessel. In 1910 it had been taken from Melbourne to Nagasaki for repairs after being grounded off the Tasmanian coast. The Marine Board had declared her unseaworthy, but it resumed trading in Australian waters until embarking on this journey to London. On arrival in England it was sold under ‘interesting circumstances’ and immediately chartered to ship 347 emigrants to Fremantle and Melbourne. A coal bunker caught fire on 5 September, which took five days to extinguish. A second bunker ignited soon after and the passengers had to be disembarked on St Helena Island; on the 12th the ship was beached, abandoned and eventually gutted by fire. *Age, Argus*, 31 May 1911, *The Times*, 14 September 1911.

54. ‘A letter from Jerusalem’, *Guardian*, 23 September 1911.

55. Ansell Notes. Mrs Jackson, although in her seventies, was working with a Presbyterian mission in Cairo in 1915 when she entertained some AIF troops from Kyneton (then training in Egypt) at her home; *Guardian*, 28 January 1915.

sons (the eldest was now approaching the senior cadet age of 14) from compulsory military training.⁵⁶

'Holy City' is now nearly forgotten, a folk memory for some residents of Kyneton, a minor episode within the context of Australia's religious and communal history. Yet there is value to be gained from a study of its existence. Those who embarked on the journey to Australia established a bond between individuals who embraced a style of collective living in the expectation of redeeming themselves, thus satisfying both their religious and psychic needs. In Kyneton, they were able to strengthen this bond through their regular study of scriptures in order to arrive at a clear understanding of their place in the events they expected might shortly engulf the world. Their studies were directed by a leader who had chosen the place of settlement and who inspired confidence in their future. Markedly isolated from the wider community in which they lived, they became the inevitable subject of rumour, name-calling and ridicule of their beliefs and life style.⁵⁷

This process of community formation was facilitated by the presence of a charismatic leader, Arthur Dalzell. Although so little is known of his background, he must have been a remarkably powerful 'spiritual director'.⁵⁸ He was able to convince an apparently financially secure group to join him in Australia, a party materially blessed in comparison with the alienated and disadvantaged classes that often sought purpose and salvation in alternative communities. Even more, he was able to command an obedience which demanded (unusually) a second hegira that took them to the uncertainties of Turkish Palestine and near disaster, even to his own death.⁵⁹

56. Ansell Notes; *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 175. Stirling is listed as a farmer at Egecombe in the 1916 issue of *Victoria Post Office Directory*. Grace Stirling died at Melbourne, 1923; William Stirling died at Melbourne, 1961.

57. Ansell suggests that even their dress became the object of derision.

58. *Guardian*, 23 September 1911.

59. Ideas in this and the preceding paragraph are based on Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England*, London, Longman, 1979, pp. 122–8, and Fogarty, pp. 19–20.

Finally, it is worth noting the place of 'Holy City' within the context of Australia's communal history up to the time of its demise. It is one of a small number of communities in which the religious or spiritual values of the members were of prime importance. The rush of communes (often called village settlements) established in the 1890s as a response to the economic depression were secular concerns, most of them supported by colonial governments (Blake lists seventy-eight such settlements operating up to 1904 in Victoria alone).⁶⁰ A few were initiated through the efforts of clergy like Horace Tucker and Charles Strong but no religious commitment was expected of the participants; even salaried managers were employed. Radical and socialist ideas were also evident. William Lane's New Australian Co-operative Settlement Association gathered 220 souls in 1893 to share life in a socialist commune, 'New Australia', in Paraguay. Nearer to home, Lane's ideology had previously inspired members of the Alice River Co-operative, located near Barcaldine, Queensland.⁶¹

Victoria was home to a number of other communities that, like 'Holy City, were led by a charismatic figure who gathered a following sharing common spiritual values and willing to commit to a communal lifestyle. Australia's first and longest-lived commune, 'Herrnhut', was formed in 1853 in western Victoria by Johann Krummnow, a millenarian Moravian. His commune began with thirty Lutherans from the Geelong area. A strongly evangelical outlook was fostered and retained until 1889. Another Lutheran, Maria Heller, established her commune at Tungamah (near Benalla) in January 1875. She had gathered a party of about sixty pilgrims in Germany who accepted her prophetic visions and spontaneous utterances. With scant farming experience and living a strict communistic regime, provisions were eventually exhausted, scurvy appeared and six adults died from malnutrition. Krummnow intervened in December after

60. Blake, 'Village settlements', p. 200.

61. The details in this and following paragraphs are drawn from Bill Metcalf, 'A Brief History of Communal Experimentation in Australia', in Bill Metcalf (ed.), *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia*, (Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1995), pp. 14-40.

reading of their plight and most families transferred to 'Herrnhut' in March 1876. The union was short-lived and Maria and her followers left in November, eventually settling on their own farms.

In May 1890 George Brown, a former Baptist pastor, established the 'Christian Community Home' near Drouin, south-east of Melbourne. It was promoted by the Christian Socialist Association which hoped life in a communal setting would enable the poor to share life's burdens so that they would become 'co-workers with Christ'. The high £100 membership fee (to be paid off in return for labour) attracted about thirty members, but there was always an overhead debt, increased by rental of the land and negligible returns from milk sales and poor crops. The commune, lacking a strong leader, had an existence of less than two years and ended in September 1891.

Nearer to Melbourne a millenarian church had developed in the 1860s among farmers living on the suburban fringe at Nunawading. In 1905 the Church of the Firstborn moved to Western Australia in order to maintain the identity and cohesion of the believers in the face of creeping suburbanization. Led by James Fisher, the 'Nunawading Messiah', their faith was a mixture of Christian Israelism, Swedenborgianism, millennialism and orthodox Protestantism. Fisher had gathered a following of approximately 100, of whom twenty families moved to Wickelup. There they gained a reputation as model farmers, their settlement, 'New Jerusalem', becoming something of a showpiece. Although not living communally, the faithful shared resources and assisted each other as occasion arose. After Fisher's death in 1913 the settlement gradually merged its identity with the wider community.

A similar relocation of a community was made by the Seventh-Day Adventists, also in 1905. New premises for their printing and literature arm, the Signs of the Times Publishing Association, were built at Warburton, located in the ranges to the east of Melbourne. Up to forty workers and their families moved to the area and built homes near their workplace. Associated Adventist activities followed: a sanitarium and hospital in 1912, a health food factory in 1925.

There were also those Australians who chose to join communes overseas. Lane's adventure in South America has been noted above. Less well-known are the two parties who left Australia to join Alexander Dowie and his Christian Catholic Church at Zion City on the shores of Lake Michigan. A party of fifty pilgrims from Adelaide left for Zion in March 1904; a second party from Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney left in April 1905, despite the revelations of the disillusioned who had already returned home. Only ten weeks prior to the departure of that second group, a party of seventy-nine Christian Israelites left Melbourne for Benton Harbor, Michigan, to join the House of David. They had been persuaded by Benjamin Purnell that, as the successor to John Wroe as Angelic Messenger, his community and his teaching was the only path to follow in order to join the elect. Many of them also became disillusioned, some returning to Melbourne, some remaining in America.⁶²

In comparison with those communes noted above, 'Holy City' remains unique in the Australian context. It is the only commune known to have restorationist origins and certainly unique in the class and wealth of its participants. But most remarkable is the witness to their beliefs through their rejection of unacceptable legislation, reinforced by an inner strength displayed as intense loyalty for their leader. It is doubtful that any other Australian commune evoked such total commitment.

62. For details of those who ventured to America, see my article, 'The Seventh Messenger and Australia 1904-1980: Benjamin Purnell and the House of David', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2005), pp. 290-309.