

ST JOHN'S LIBRARY

A NINETEENTH CENTURY ATTEMPT
TO EDUCATE THE COMMON MAN

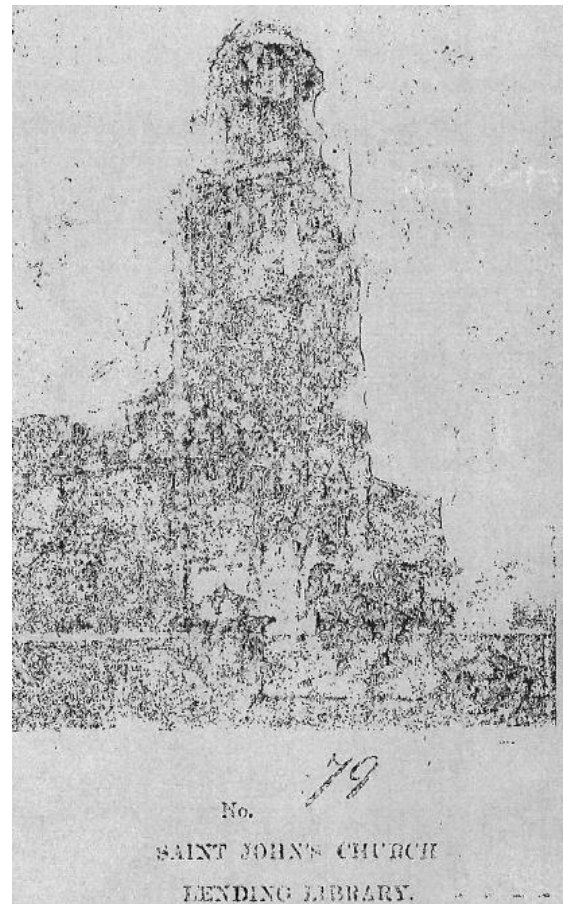
THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA

NORTHERN BRANCH

BULLETIN 10

OCTOBER, 1975

*Likely a copy of the library
label inside book No. 79*



ST JOHN'S LIBRARY

A NINETEENTH CENTURY ATTEMPT
TO IMPROVE THE COMMON MAN

A paper read to the Northern
Branch of the Royal Society
of Tasmania, on Friday,
5th March 1971.

P.G. Webb, B.A.,
Lecturer in History,
Launceston Teachers College.



*Family crest of
Revd. W.H. Browne*

In 1969, while exploring the tower of 'St., John's Church, I came upon a quantity of books. After some enquiries I found that I had not stumbled upon a bibliophile's dream, but that these books had been culled through and the best had gone to Christ College. What was left was regarded as of little interest or value.

As far as monetary value is concerned, this is probably true. Mr. Sprod, the University Librarian - with whom I have discussed the collection says, "Nineteenth Century theological books do not cause much excitement amongst collectors and high valuations are not placed upon them." But as to the interest value, I rate this highly, even though the books comprise but the remnant of a quite extensive library begun and built up, I believe, by the Reverend William Henry Browne, LL.D.

This gentleman was the third incumbent of St. John's Church, and in his forty years of service saw the colony transformed from a penal colony to a fully self-governing sovereign state. Indeed, he actively assisted in this transformation. He was born in 1800, entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1817 to read for the law, but emerged five years later a Bachelor of Arts, having majored in Theology. At some time in the next five or six years he took his Doctorate; when precisely is not known, for his name is not entered in the Trinity College rolls, but there seems no doubt as to the authenticity of his elevation.

The young Doctor Browne was priested in 1824. In 1827 there died the Revd. James Youl, founder of the Symons Plains dynasty and first Chaplain to the settlement at Port Dalrymple. Three months later the government appointed the Revd. Charles Norman as temporary Chaplain. Dr. Browne was appointed Chaplain to Port Dalrymple by the British government in 1828, he arrived in Hobart Town in October and was gazetted Chaplain at Launceston on All Saints' Day of the same year.

His parish stretched from Campbell Town north to the coast, and from Longford to the East coast - an area of about 39800 square miles containing 4,446 inhabitants in 1828. His duties included at least six services a week at the Church, the gaol and the female house of correction.

He acquired a school soon after his arrival, but was forced to relinquish it in 1833, under pressure from Archdeacon Scott, his ecclesiastical superior. Because of the loss of pupils, he applied for, but was refused, an increase of £150 per annum in his salary.

Dr. Browne was an outspoken opponent of ritualism in the Church and at one stage he and a fellow priest were stigmatised by Bishop Nixon as "unsound in their religions opinions". Browne's opposition to his Bishop was open and public, calling down upon him the comment that Launceston was "that common lunatic asylum where the ravings of the disappointed seem to find a natural home". ⁽¹⁾ This is not to imply that he was a critic of the Establishment, for I doubt if this could be shown. But he was a community-minded man. He was one of the Committee formed in 1838 to establish the Launceston Church Grammar School, he was a staunch supporter of John West in the Anti-transportation campaign, he was on the Committee of Management of St. John's Hospital, which opened on 1st September, 1845 in what is now Morton House, he was a prime mover in 1835 in founding the Launceston Bank for Savings, and throughout his life he pressed for the extension of savings bank facilities to the whole community, rural as well as urban. To do this, he urged that the government guarantee a Post Office Savings Bank - a scheme that was eventually adopted.

⁽¹⁾ P. & P., T.H.R.A., June 1964

In May 1868, Dr. Browne resigned his office because of age and ill health. In 1870 he was appointed Archdeacon of Launceston - evidently much more of an honorary post than now - and he held this office until his death in 1877. The late Bishop Barrett, in his paper read to the Tasmanian Historical Research Association on 27th June, 1964, concluded with these words:

"Dr. Browne was a man of character, ability and integrity, and during a long ministry of just on half a century, made a great contribution to the life and work of the Church and community." ⁽¹⁾

I believe a significant aspect of his contribution to the community was his earnest endeavour to uplift his fellow men through reading.

Bishop Barrett mentions as one of the reverend doctor's activities "he acted as agent for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and by this means provided something like a church book depot in Launceston". I suggest that the case is rather understated, that in fact Dr. Browne established a library open to the public, that he did this at first at his church - St. John's - and that what remains is but the remnant of a quite extensive and varied collection, within the limits that were applicable to a Protestant Irish cleric of the first half of the nineteenth century, living in an antipodean penal colony.

The books I have found total 314. Some of them are partial or complete sets, thus there are altogether 237 titles. Most, but not all of the books, are on theology, and the collection was called, apparently indiscriminately, the St. John's Lending Library, or the St. John's Theological Library.

I believe this library was in operation before the opening of the Mechanics' Institute Library in Launceston. It is thus a parochial library in the direct line of the English Parochial Library, which, of course, dates back to the sixteenth century. I am indebted to the Librarian of the Teachers College for the following note:

A distinction should be made between Parish and Parochial libraries Parish libraries were designed for the use of the inhabitants of the particular parish, while parochial libraries were under the direct control of the church. Many parochial libraries were also parish libraries - this was particularly the case in Scotland where it was the general rule - but a parish library was not necessarily parochial, nor was a parochial library necessarily for the use of the parish.

Here it should be noted that the parish council in Britain is an elected body, generally of a non-political nature, on which adherents of any church, or no church at all, may sit. It is a minor local government body, usually limited in its powers to imposing a small rate for minor improvements in the parish. On the other hand, the parochial council is the local Anglican church's governing body, all members must be church members on the electoral roll of the parish church.

Many of the parochial libraries were also referred to as endowed libraries, as they owed their very existence to endowment usually from a local benefactor, sometimes the Vicar or Rector himself. The collections of books were generally donated under a common formula: "to the rector (vicar) and his successors for ever". In some instances the donor also had a library room built, adjoining the church usually on the south side, at his own expense. One vicar in Kent himself bequeathed the best of his books to be chained in the upper room, over the church school, to form a public library for the ministers and gentlemen of Blackheath and "all the godly students that will frequent it".

⁽¹⁾ P. & P., T.H.R.A., June 1964.

The first provision of books in churches for the laymen goes back as far as 1536, when Thomas Cromwell's injunction for the chaining of the Bible in churches came into operation. The Bible was followed by a number of other books, notably the two books of Homilies, the 'Paraphrases' of Erasmus, Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' (its official title was History of the Acts and Monuments of the Church), and others, all being chained to lecterns or reading desks. By the mid-seventeenth century every parish church had its own small library of books, mostly theological in content, although secular works did appear occasionally.

Many of the old parochial libraries were intended only for use by the clergy, but as time passed books "*written in English tongue for the good and benefit of the volger and not so well learned sort of people*" were added.

Chained books gave place to locked gates at the entrance of each alcove.

Many parochial libraries were appropriated in one way or another either by the school which grew out of the library room, or by the local parish council, and in this way the church lost most of its libraries. In just over one hundred parish churches in the United Kingdom there exist only a few books from these early libraries, all the others having been either lost, destroyed, or given to schools or local authorities. ⁽¹⁾

In this case, I believe we have here a parochial library, transplanted as it were, intended for the use not only of the clergy but also of the 'vulgar and not so well learned sort of people' - the people of Launceston, lay and cleric, convict and free.

Several different lots or groups of books are distinguishable. First, there are thirty-two books from Dr. Browne's personal library, they are marked in one of three ways. Some have a book plate on which is printed the family's coat of arms. Some others are simply inscribed 'Presented by the Rev. W.H. Browne, L.L.D.', and a few have a book plate imprinted with the jingle:

*If thou are borrowed by a Friend,
Right welcome shall he be
To read, to study, not to lend
But to return to me;
Not that imparted knowledge doth
Diminish learning's store,
But Books, I find, if often lent,
Return to me no more,*

Rev. W.H. Browne – 18^{??}

These thirty-two books are incorporated into a larger lot, totalling one hundred and thirty-five, numbered in sequence on end papers and spines, with numbers ranging from 2 to 495. All are on theology, and the group includes copies of the New Testament in Portuguese, Dutch, German and, of course, Greek.

A second group of books, one hundred and twenty-four in all, is not numbered. However it seems probable that at least half of them were part of the same lot as the first, because their appearance and subject matter are the same and their publication dates approximate. Included in this group is a number of books on 'profane' subjects - as opposed to sacred literature. Some were written anonymously and published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; they were intended to inform and elevate the standard of general knowledge, a point to which I will return.

⁽¹⁾ Information from the late E.G. Nichol, Librarian, L'ton Teachers College.

These two groups of books comprise the bulk of the present collection - 259 out of what was originally at least 500 titles. One can almost see the earnest priest, in the prime of his life, carefully numbering the gummed labels, licking them and sticking them to the spines of these books, collected with anxious care. His own tastes and prejudices show plainly in the following titles - selected at random:

Scripture Readings for the Young
Lessons on the Epistles designed for use in Schools
A Short History of the English Church addressed to the Young
Bishop Burnet's Exposition of the 39 Articles
The Panorama of Science, or A Guide to Knowledge
Bishop Hall's Contemplations
Dr. Lyttleton's Latin Dictionary
Rutherford's Greek Grammar
Tales in Natural History
Conversations on Natural Philosophy adapted
to the comprehension of young Pupils
Modern History by Michelet

a number of books on Logic, Ethics and Moral Philosophy and, as might be expected, 19 books of Sermons, seventeen books of Lectures, Dissertations or Expositions, and numerous works on Biblical History.

The overall impression one gets of him is that he was well informed, up-to-date, an avid reader - his journals record his daily reading - and one interested in the welfare of others, particularly of the young.

To support this opinion there is the evidence not only of the books about which I have already spoken, but also of three other small groups of books. These books could not have formed part of the original library, since they are numbered in sequence but the numbers clash with those already mentioned.

First, there is a lot of seventeen books, with numbers ranging from 19 to 132. They are of uniform size and bound in blue calf, stamped on the cover S.P.C.K. Dates of publication of these books range only from 1828 to 1837. I believe them to be part of a separate library sent out by the S.P.C.K. and placed in Dr. Browne's care. Almost all of them are of the improving literature variety:

History of the Old and New Testaments
History of Wonderful Fishes, etc.

The second of these three groups is also numbered in sequence, and once again the numbers clash; in nineteen books the numbers range from 4 to 299. In subject matter they come down heavily on the side of the angels - one of the most interesting books in the group is the Works of William Chillingworth, originally published in 1727.

The third of these three separate collections is a group of fourteen books, uniformly bound in brown calf, stamped on the front S.P.C.K. and having Captain Mulgrave's name written on the title page. It seems to me that they were part of a library kept in the care of the Captain. As their publication dates are all prior to 1820, it seems possible that these books were sent out by the S.P.C.K. prior to Dr. Browne's appointment, that when he began his library the S.P.C.K. sent books to him direct, and at some later date the books already here belonging to the S.P.C.K. were then handed in to his care.

These, then, are the details of the books found. I believe them to be the remnant of the St. John's Library, plus some stray volumes that somehow found their way into the collection. I believe the bulk of the library was got together by Dr. Browne and that he actively encouraged his congregation - convict and free - to use it. For it seems clear to me it was intended for the use of the public; the evidence is not strong, but the inferences to be drawn from this remnant of the collection are plain enough.

In the first group mentioned were about 500 titles, of which only 32 for certain remain, though one could probably add the second group, one hundred and twenty-four un-numbered titles. Thus, at most, one hundred and fifty six books of the original five hundred remain and of this remnant there are some twenty-one, or thirteen per cent, that are not theological in content.

The other groups of books, from the S.P.C.K., total fifty out of a maximum possible four hundred and fifty. Of this total of fifty books, twenty-one are secular in content, that is, forty per cent.

It seems reasonable to infer, then, that since a significant proportion of the books still held is secular in content, and since the reading public was more likely to want secular than theological books, then there must have been a higher, possibly much higher, proportion of the missing books on secular subjects.

Thus, what Dr. Browne used originally in his own studies evolved, by means of additions of books from elsewhere, mainly the S.P.C.K into a public lending library, in which the accent was on improvement not only of the soul but of the mind and body. As to this last point, consider the titles:

Readings in Biography - a selection of the lives of eminent men of all Nations.

Travels in Switzerland.

Conversations on Mineralogy.

History of Wonderful Fishes.

Shenac's Work at Home - a story of Canadian life.

Useful Knowledge of Nature, Mineral, Vegetable and Animal (there are two distinct editions of this title, each edition of several volumes).

Animal Biography - by the same author as the preceding title.

English History for the use of Public Schools.

The Life of Arthur, Duke of Wellington.

The Panorama of Science, or a Guide to Knowledge.

Sister Mary's Tales in Natural History.

The Works of Flavius Josephus.

Poetical Works of Robert Montgomery.

Fuller's 'Worthies of England'.

An Analysis of English and French History, etc. etc.

The natural science content is pre-Darwinian and some of it makes curious reading nowadays. Educationally, the books are written down to a fairly low level. There is, for instance, the aforementioned *History of Wonderful Fishes*. As a historian, I confess to a somewhat reluctant admiration for the anonymous author who reduced the whole of English history from the Conquest

to the death of George III into fewer than 100 pages - this in marked contrast to the 6-volume account of the life and works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London!

There are a number of other interesting points about this library. How it was financed I do not yet know. Its active life as a library accessible to the whole public was probably quite short. I say this partly because, in the first place, the bulk of these books were published before 1850, indicating a decline of interest after that date, and, secondly, because the Mechanics' Institute opened in 1842, thus ultimately filling the need more adequately; and, finally, because the books of later date are much more exclusively theological in subject matter and are unnumbered.

Some individual books that may be of interest to you are the following: "*Scripture Lessons for Schools etc.*" There are four copies, two of which are inscribed 'Ladies School of Industry, Feb. 2 1848'.

'*Lectures on the Papal Claim to Jurisdiction*' by Thomas Allwood, printed by Kemp & Fairfax at the Morning Herald Office, Sydney. It must be a rarity, for there cannot be many books written and published in Sydney and dedicated to the Lord Bishop of Australia.

'*Biblical Notes and Dissertations ... to confirm the deity of Christ*' - has an interesting note recording the visit of the Quakers Backhouse and Walker.

Dr. Browne's Irish connection was evidently maintained, for a two-volume set of '*Ten Lectures on the Philosophy of the Mosaic Record of Creation*', published in 1827, was presented by Trinity College to the Doctor. He cannot have been impressed, for the volumes are uncut. Of much more value to him was a copy of what was then quite a famous book: '*Cautions for the Times*' by Richard Whateley, Archbishop of Dublin. The book was published in 1853 and, as the inscription shows, presented to the Doctor.

The publication history revealed in these books is another point of interest. In some cases the author printed the book himself, in others, printers combined to launch a book, thus pooling their resources and spreading the risk. Publishing as a separate branch of book production can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century, according to one authority ⁽¹⁾ although Chambers Encyclopaedia states categorically "Not until the 19th century did the book publisher become distinct from the printer and bookseller". ⁽²⁾ However, there seems to be general agreement that printers separated from the publisher-bookseller quite early, then during the seventeenth century became independent altogether of the publisher. The latter became organiser and co-ordinator of the production and distribution of books, and all this can be detected in much earlier times than the period of this collection. Yet, for all that, this library provides evidence of the fluidity and still undeveloped nature of much of the printing, publishing and bookselling trade. For example, whereas in 1735 Dr. Lyttleton's Dictionary was issued and sold by a combine of twenty-nine different jobbing printers in much the same way as books had put on the market centuries earlier; one can also find ample evidence of the building up of companies that were almost exclusively publishing houses. Not only that, but the varied locations of the printers and publishers provides evidence of growth of the business in about a century and a half. For at the time of the restoration, (1660) an Act confined printing and publishing to twenty firms in London, one in Edinburgh and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

(1) Binns, N.E.: *An Introduction to Historical Bibliography*.

(2) Chambers Encyclopaedia: Article on Publishing.

Most of these books date from the early years of the nineteenth century:

30 were published between 1800 and 1820,
54 in the next decade to 1830, and
45 in the decade to 1840.

Yet, while most of the publishers and printers were in London, others of the books originated in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Bath, Cheltenham, Oxford and Cambridge and Canterbury in Great Britain; from Dublin in Ireland; and from Hobart Town and Sydney in Australia, Calcutta and Madras in India and one from Halifax, presumably in Canada.

To revert to my earlier point about the growth of modern publishing houses, one finds that a number of books were printed by a firm which;

in 1771 called itself J. RIVINGTON,
in 1810 it was F.C. RIVINGTON
in 1826 ...C. & J. RIVINGTON
in 1830C. & J. RIVINGTON
and in 1875 simply RIVINGTON'S

To cite another instance - a number of these books were published by the firm now known simply as Longman's, a firm which traces its history back to 1724.

One of the books in this sample was published by;

1811 - LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME and BROWN.
1820 - LONGMAN & CO., with others.
1824 - LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, BROWNE and GREEN.
1829 - LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWNE and GREEN (Hurst had gone).
1834 - LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWNE, GREEN and LONGMAN.
1849 - LONGMAN, BROWNE, GREEN and LONGMANS
1864 - LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, ROBERTS and GREEN
1898 - LONGMAN, GREEN & CO.

Other names still in the publishing business are:

Blackie & Son - a book dated 1853,
Hodder & Stroughton, one dated 1881,
Macmillan & Co., one dated 1870 and another 1874,
T. Nelson, Edinburgh, dated 1823,
W'm Collins, Glasgow and London, dated 1853, and
W. Blackwood, Edinburgh, dated 1825.

A final point worth noting, when considering the printing and publishing of the books, is the distinct difference in quality of production. In most books, the quality of paper is good, typeface is large and clear, margins are wide and the general appearance of the page attractive. Exceptions to this generalization are either books printed earlier than most of the collection or made very small to fit in the pocket. But it is when one looks at the cases, which are meant to protect and preserve the book, that one notices the contrasts. Many the books are bound in leather, meant to last centuries, others have only thin board covers and paper backs. It seems to me that the only way to account for the survival of latter is to suggest that they could not have been in great demand.

Finally, a word about the authors. Few of the authors are remembered now and only one of these books - '*History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*' Albrecht Ritschl, is regarded as in any way an authority. This is in fact a very undistinguished remnant of the collection. Some books still useful were removed to the library of Christ College a few years ago, the rest have been scattered goodness knows where. But some of the authors still here are:

J.A. Addison, Professor of Theology at Princeton, the Revd. Charles Kingsley, George, Lord Lyttleton, Edward Pusey, a certain Edward Stanley who was both D.D. and F.G.S., Richard Whateley, already mentioned, and last, though perhaps not least, the Revd. Henry P. Fry of St. George's Church, Hobart Town. There are twenty-one bishops - including a Bishop of Sodor and Man - a Bishop of Huron, a Bishop of Calcutta and translations of two books by a Bishop of Zealand in Denmark. Including the twenty-one Right Reverend Lords, there are 26 Doctors of Divinity and 7 Doctors of Letters. Seven the authors are foreigners. One of the most popular or prolific appears to have been the Revd. Edward Bickersteth, afterwards a Bishop here. He wrote seven of the books in the collection. Another popular writer was the Revd. William Bingley, for Dr. Browne had multiple sets of his two series, one called *Useful Knowledge* and the other *Animal Biography*.

Many of these mostly reverend gentlemen - for there are only a few laymen and but two lady authors in the whole listing - were doomed to rest unread, for a number of the books remain uncut, even the six-volume collected edition of *The Works of The Revd. Beilby Porteus, Lord Bishop of London!!* But, as I have said, the books we have left are but the remains of the library and it seems reasonable to suppose that those missing were more popular, hence either wore out, or, more likely, remained in the hands of the borrower. I say likely because it must be remembered that this library was a going concern. It was built up largely over a period of ten or twelve years, then tailed off after the public institutions had been opened. I cannot believe that a man as level-headed and pragmatic as Revd. William Henry Browne proved to be, would have continued to work for long had there not been a fairly steady demand for books of this kind, and that is why I feel it is worth drawing to your attention and preserving this remnant of the St. John's Theological Library - a nineteenth century attempt to improve the common man.

-000000000-