

Friends of Caroline Chisholm

NEWSLETTER

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The editorial in issue #2 of the Newsletter lamented that, despite widespread support for Caroline Chisholm being the next Australian candidate for beatification, “there is still no official cause as no particular bishop has come forward to take responsibility for it”. That was four years ago, and it remains the case.

One of the Australian bishops asked where was the “evidence of cult”, the Church’s technical term for the veneration given to either a proclaimed saint or someone (not yet a proclaimed saint) whose life of heroic virtue radiates exemplary qualities, to both her contemporaries and following generations. Evidence of cult was put forward

in issue #2’s editorial and in all past issues. Further evidence is provided in four articles in this issue. There’s the respect and attention accorded over many years to Caroline Chisholm’s grave, the blessing of the refurbished gravestone and visitation by pilgrims, the financial plan to ensure the gravestone’s future upkeep, and new examples of popular poetry and devotion. These are undeniably evidence of cult.

The final article looks at an historical episode: Mrs Chisholm’s involvement in securing a funeral carriage to replace the dog-cart used for the friendless poor in 1840s Sydney. How did this come about? Why did it take so long?

Completed Refurbishment of the Chisholm Gravestone

Issue #9 of the Newsletter reported that the gravestone for Caroline and Archibald Chisholm was in urgent need of repair and cleaning. Good news! The refurbishment has now been completed and, what’s more, paid for in full.

Carole Walker commissioned the refurbishing work in July, 2014, contributing £240 as the deposit to the stonemasons. The remainder of £964 was donated locally and by Australian Friends responding to the Newsletter article.

The refurbished gravestone is shown to the right. The effectiveness of the cleaning is clearly evident. The fungi and other ravages of time have been removed, and the inscription can once again be read easily. The gravestone is stable, although Carole advises that a nearby tree has grown considerably in recent years and overhangs the grave. Obtaining Northampton Council’s permission to prune the tree will be difficult, she says, because the Billings Road cemetery is in a conservation area.

The stonemasons have suggested regular cleaning of the gravestone with soapy water and perhaps an annual or bi-annual inspection, so as to ensure everything is in order. Discussions are underway to see whether students from

Caroline Chisholm School in Northampton or another agency could do the regular cleaning. Either way, the stonemasons’ inspections and any required remedial work will entail monetary costs. Some sort of trust has been proposed and is outlined in an article on page (2).



Caroline and Archibald Chisholm’s grave in Billings Road cemetery, Northampton. Carole Walker supplied the photograph.

Blessing Service for the Refurbished Gravestone

A special service to bless the refurbished gravestone took place in November, 2014. The service was led by Father Mark Floody, Dean of the Cathedral of Our Lady and St Thomas, Northampton. The Reverend Michael Hills from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre read the approved prayer for Caroline Chisholm's cause, while Carole Walker read Romans 14:7-12. Approximately twenty people attended the service.



From left to right: Carole Walker, Reverend Michael Hills, Father Mark Floody, Councillor Tony Ansell, and one of the Cathedral parishioners. Carole Walker supplied the photograph.

It is very pleasing to see the participation of clergy and parishioners from the Anglican church in which Caroline and Archibald were married and where she had been baptised and from the Catholic Cathedral where her funeral service had been conducted. (No requiem mass could be celebrated as she was buried on Easter Saturday.) Fittingly, a civic representative from the town of her birth was also present.

Pilgrims and visitors making their way to the grave will now find everything in excellent order. In Spring they will be greeted by blooming daffodils, as pictured in issue #9 of the Newsletter, and by white crocus blooms. A white crocus was named after Caroline Chisholm in the 1860s, but the crocus bulbs being planted are a later variety.

Carole Walker reports that Roger and Susan Sawtell, who planted the daffodils and often tend the grave, were at the blessing service. So, too, was Susan Dauksta, aged in her eighties, who previously looked after the area around the grave. In death as in life, the Emigrant's Friend does not lack friends.

Financial Arrangements for the Gravestone's Future Upkeep

Enquiries are being made to determine what financial arrangements can be put in place for the future upkeep of the Chisholm gravestone. One proposal is to set up a trust in England solely for that purpose or a trust that includes the gravestone's upkeep among a number of objectives which will commemorate Mrs Chisholm and her work, such as the stained glass window in Holy Sepulchre Church, Northampton (see the article in issue #9 of the Newsletter).

Creating and administering a trust involves financial outlay initially and, moreover, it calls for the continuing input and oversight of the trustees and, should they not have all necessary skills and legal knowledge, recourse to some level of professional (paid) support.

Australian Friends gave a little over AUD \$3,000 for the gravestone refurbishment, which, when added to the monies raised in England, more than covered its total cost. The excess is

to be allocated to the stained glass window project or retained expressly for the future upkeep of the gravestone under whatever financial arrangements are finalized.

To assure the gravestone's long-term upkeep a somewhat larger sum is likely to be required. How much larger is not known at this stage, but appropriate advice in that regard will be obtained.

The financial arrangements just considered relate to what may or will be organised in England. There is nothing of a similar kind currently organised or planned in Australia. The Friends of Caroline Chisholm have a bank account with a modest balance, attained from occasional small donations. Postage of materials to the Australian bishops has been the main cost. Email distribution of the Newsletter is, of course, free, but redevelopment of the website has stalled due partly to financial constraints and partly to the webmaster's fatigue.

Popular Poetry and Devotions

Popular poetry, particularly when set to music, can tell us much about how ordinary people see things and what and who they view as significant in their society and in earlier times. Likewise, we can learn much from the prayers and heartfelt commendations found in popular religious devotions.

An example of popular poetry and another of popular religious devotion were received by one of the Newsletter team in December, 2014. Here are the lyrics for a new folk song.

Caroline Chisholm's Cake
by David O'Brien

Who is this lady so caring?
A woman of some social bearing
Although she looks to be a Gentleman's wife
And comes to the aid of those past caring
Especially the girls not so well faring

Chorus:

Fifty-one pieces of wedding cake
Fifty one pieces of cake
Not given away to make her great
But to the poor for God's own sake

I saw a girl of 15 years
She was so like many of her peers
Wondering upon the streets her employment
Was to be subject to men's enjoyment
This lady took her away from that
And took her home to her own flat

Chorus

She came to notice after hearing sad plights
Of women on ships deprived of their rights
An issue caused her to take this to Magistrate
The captain he thought he'd show his mates
That a female passenger in stocks on deck at night
Would be quite enough to give all a fright

Chorus

After being in Australia for many years
She returned to England without any fears
And became a spokesperson for emigration
To help build up this great nation
She was once remembered on the five dollar bill
A helper of families and much loved still

Bridge:

Fifty one pieces of cake
Fifty one pieces of cake
Caroline Chisholm a saint
The patron saint of the wedding cake

David O'Brien SDB is a Salesian brother in Melbourne. He says Caroline Chisholm is "a great role model", and he wishes "she was still around", adding "what a difference she would make . . . especially regarding refugees, asylum seekers and trafficked persons".

Brother David has also composed the music for *Caroline Chisholm's Cake*. He is hoping to have it recorded.

A new prayer and devotional card have been produced in connection with the proposed cause for Caroline Chisholm. The card carries the logo of the Broken Bay diocese, which takes in Sydney's Northern suburbs and the Central Coast, but key personnel in the diocesan office are not aware of its originator/s or funder/s. The card has no contact details.

The new prayer has some phrasing from the prayer approved by Archbishop Mark Coleridge in 2007 - "patient . . . energetic faith" and so on - but it is quite different in its approach and overall content. For instance, it focuses chiefly on Mrs Chisholm's relieving "the suffering of people in need, particularly poor emigrants" and commends her "witness". Copyright law precludes printing the entire new prayer without the (anonymous) creator's permission.

So, one or more of the faithful have decided to prepare and distribute a new prayer for Caroline Chisholm's proposed cause which better encapsulates their appreciation of her heroic virtue. The devotional card has a succinct summary of her work, centering on "the welfare of young girls and families arriving in Australia with little hope of a bright future". As well, it has a modern image of Mrs Chisholm and low resolution graphics that appear to be sourced from a website.

These are two initiatives recently brought to the notice of the Newsletter team. How many others are out there?

It's relevant to mention again that Cradio has interviewed Clara Geoghegan about the life of Caroline Chisholm and how she changed so many lives and remains a prophet of the laity. Listen to and download the interview on:

<http://cradio.org.au/talks-and-resources/>

Replacing the Dog-Cart for the Friendless Poor's Funerals

Of the three major biographies, only Mary Hoban's refers to Caroline Chisholm's involvement in securing a hearse to convey the deceased friendless poor to their graves [see *Fifty-one Pieces of Wedding Cake*, pages 104 and 179]. Hoban states that "at Mrs Chisholm's prompting, a subscription list was opened for a hearse", implying this occurred in or soon after August, 1842. The list was first published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 February, 1843, when subscriptions amounted to £14.10.3. They totalled £36.6.3 on 1 April, 1843, according to the same newspaper, whose next updated list was in its 8 October, 1844 issue, when the total had dropped to £32, leaving £13 still to be raised.

Hoban attributes what she describes as a slow start and the shelving in mid-1843 to "hard times" and "the depression" respectively. This explanation and Hoban's general account are inadequate, in my view.

Mrs Chisholm is certainly the person named as receiving subscriptions for the hearse, and a news item in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 February, 1843 reported that she had "endeavoured to procure subscriptions". Just when she began to do so is not known.

Using the National Library's Trove search facility, I could find no newspaper references to subscriptions being sought prior to the list's first publication. In the apparent absence of any public solicitation, Mrs Chisholm might have approached the Anglican Bishop, who had twice berated the Colonial government's inaction about the use of a dog-cart for funerals (in 1840 and 1841), either directly or through an intermediary (perhaps her Anglican friend, the Reverend Allwood). Had this occurred, it would probably have been after the 2 August, 1842 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This strongly criticised the practice whereby the "vehicle which is used to remove nuisances [such as dead dogs] from the streets" is also used to convey "the friendless . . . to their last home", and it proposed ending the practice by public subscriptions for a hearse rather than rely on a disinterested government.

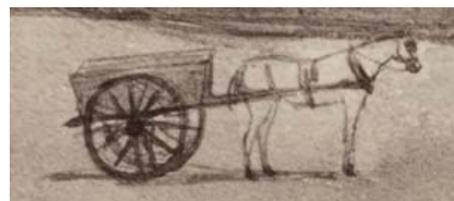
The Anglican bishop was the first subscriber, and Catholic and Anglican clergymen were prominent in the subscriptions lists published in early 1843, as were firm friends of Mrs Chisholm (such as Roger Therry and Lady O'Connell). Archbishop Polding later subscribed upon his return from overseas, and Governor Gipps matched the Anglican bishop's £5 after the subscription list was made public.

Contrary to Hoban's account, Caroline Chisholm is unlikely to have canvassed subscriptions before late 1842 because she was ill in August and was in the throes of finalizing her book in September, according to various newspaper notices. Hoban does not cite any evidence for Mrs Chisholm's "prompting" the opening of a subscription list. It seems more likely that she responded to the *Sydney Morning Herald's* August, 1842 proposal in that regard when no-one else had stepped forward.

What Hoban calls the shelving of subscriptions in mid-1843 could not have been due simply to "the depression". Notwithstanding a depressed economy, more than 80% of the eventual tender cost of £45 had been subscribed when Mrs Chisholm advertised on 4 May, 1843 for a hearse, neat and strong, drawn by one horse, and without ornamental trimmings. There was no further news about the hearse until October, 1844.

By that time, as earlier noted, only £32 had actually been collected, leaving £13 of the tender cost unmet. Within three months all but £2.9.5 was raised and the hearse began its dignified conveyance of the deceased friendless poor. Why subscriptions stalled will be considered in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Rodney Stinson



This type of cart is the one most commonly drawn by the artist John Rae in his Sydney sketches of the early 1840s. Whether it is similar to the so-called dog-cart is not known.