

Friends of Caroline Chisholm

NEWSLETTER

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January 2011



Welcome. Since our inaugural issue Australia has seen the celebration of the canonisation of St Mary of the Cross. There is no doubt that the Australian Catholic community was deeply enriched by that event and by her example of enduring fidelity.

Should Mrs Chisholm be the next Australian candidate for beatification? Many of our correspondents presume this to be the case. However, despite private encouragement for her cause from numerous Australian bishops, there is still no official cause as no particular bishop has come forward to take responsibility for it.

Following the canonisation of St Mary of the Cross, Catholic media have reported the beginning of the process of canonisation of Mary Glowrey. A Melbourne doctor and founder of the Catholic Women's League, she eventually entered religious life and directed a number of medical facilities assisting the poor in India. A worthy candidate, whose cause was immediately and enthusiastically commenced by the Archbishop of Bangalore. Also in the news is Sr Irene McCormack rsj, another Josephite religious, who was martyred in Peru. Again a worthy candidate, supported by the people and a bishop of the region where she worked and died.

Why not Mrs Chisholm? She was a lay woman, married and the mother of nine children (of whom six survived into adulthood), and she conducted the greatest social ministry of any individual in her time and since in the history of Australia. An extraordinary achievement! There is no doubt from her own writings that she dedicated her life to, and sacrificed her comfort and that of her family for, the vocation to which she believed God had called her

Friends of Caroline Chisholm have been advised that we need to show 'evidence of cult'. Precisely what would satisfy this criterion is unclear. Surely the existence of many Catholic schools and welfare organizations named for Caroline Chisholm is evidence of cult.

And the commemoration of Mrs Chisholm in stained glass windows, mosaics, paintings, a play, a musical and books, is this not evidence of cult? (The mosaic being erected at St Peter's and Paul's Goulburn featured in our first newsletter.) Reviewed in this issue is the recently published book, *A Saviour of Human Cargoes*, by English-woman Carole Walker which demonstrates continued interest in England. The inclusion of Mrs Chisholm in *Called and Gifted* workshops in the United States further demonstrates her relevance to the universal Church as a woman of heroic virtue.

The existence of the Friends of Caroline Chisholm, dedicated to promoting Mrs Chisholm's life of heroic virtue, is evidence of cult. The production and distribution of two versions of prayer cards asking for her intercession, in the 1970s/1980s and currently, is certainly evidence of cult. Individuals, under their own initiative, have sought out her grave when visiting England. Is this not evidence of cult? The unanimously supportive response from lay Catholics to the work of the Friends leaves us with no doubt the Catholic faithful hold Mrs Chisholm in the highest esteem.

Perhaps the problem is that no miracle has been attributed to Caroline Chisholm's intercession? To date, no system of recording prayers answered has been in place, but this is about to change (see page 4 of this newsletter).

Perhaps what distresses us most is the niggling suspicion that although her life pre-figured precisely the model of holiness for the laity outlined by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent magisterial teaching on the laity, Mrs Chisholm is seen as merely a lay woman whose work was not conducted under the direct auspices of the Church and who did not bequeath to the Church enduring institutions, and that therefore she is somehow not worthy of the honour.

How else are we to interpret the paradoxical private support and official silence of our bishops?

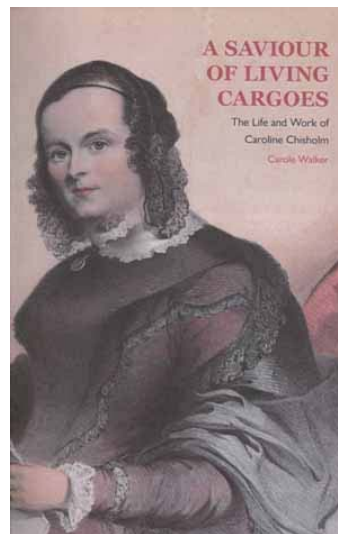
A Saviour of Living Cargoes—Book Review

The Saviour of Carole Walker's book title is Caroline Chisholm. In the bustling, expanding shipping industry of the mid-nineteenth century, the owners of commercial cargo to and from England had more legislative and insured protection than emigrating passengers, the living cargoes. Overcrowding, unsafe and unhygienic conditions, and commonly the ship owners' failure to abide by contracted agreements were periodically the subject of Parliamentary inquiries, leading to marginal improvements over time in the Passenger Act but a lack of resolute bureaucratic action. Having returned to England in 1846 in order the better to work for emigration reform, Mrs Chisholm was an influential voice in the following years, and a much-improved Passenger Act was achieved in 1852.

The arresting book title was sourced from Dr Walker's extensive historical research, originally undertaken for her doctoral degree. Published in 2009, her book is the second academic biography of Caroline Chisholm, and long may Dr Walker continue her research interests. The first, of course, was Margaret Kiddle's 1950 biography, which was particularly illuminating on Mrs Chisholm's endeavours in Australia.

Dr Walker's book is particularly illuminating on Mrs Chisholm's family and upbringing in Northampton, and on her emigration work in the United Kingdom from 1846 to 1854. Her father's social standing, moderate prosperity, marriages and progeny are revealed with a level of reliable detail not found in earlier accounts. How many marriages? Three, two wives dying in or soon after childbirth and the third, Caroline's mother, living to a hale old age. Dr Walker leaves open the question as to how the young Caroline obtained her education, including good French, when her mother "made her mark rather than sign either her marriage entry or her will".

The magnitude of Mrs Chisholm's promotion and assistance of family-based emigration in the United Kingdom is well documented. So, too, is the extensive backing of her ideas and projects by leading politicians and like-minded reformers.



Dr Walker's mining of the archives, however, extended beyond the public records. One marvellous find is Mrs Chisholm's letter to then Bishop William Ullathorne. Written on Good Friday 1852 (and reproduced in its entirety), the letter is heartrending. It reveals the anguish of a mother without sufficient means to keep her children in the schools where she and their father wanted them to be. Their removal, she feared, would be "a *lasting disadvantage* to them". The anguish was intensified because Archibald had gone ahead to Australia and the available money had been depleted by her work for emigration reform.

"I dare not give up my work," wrote Mrs Chisholm, adding "it hangs about me as a duty". She was determined to follow her "vocation" – "seeking nothing, but waiting, watching and working". The letter was a means of her "relieving a burthened and oppressed spirit". (Burthened is an archaic form of burdened.) Despite its almost harrowing tone, Mrs Chisholm's letter is a moving testimony of faith and a valuable aid in understanding her motivation, which was one of Dr Walker's objectives in writing.

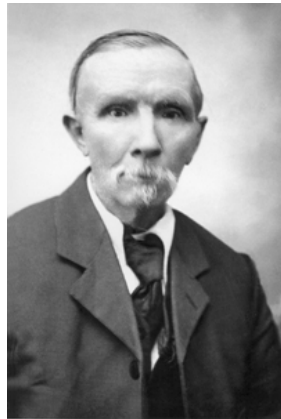
Other objectives are also admirably met. These include clearing away misconceptions introduced by early chroniclers and astute scrutiny of the historical bases of edifying claims made by later writers. Was the unappealing character of Mrs Jellyby in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* novel based mainly or even partially on Mrs Chisholm? The new biography takes us closer to settling this issue, which looms so large for certain people.

Continued on page 4.

Caroline Chisholm Reunited Families

John Wall and his younger brother Thomas rejoined their parents after a separation of almost seven years, reaching Sydney in the *Sir Edward Parry* on 24 February, 1848. Their parents William and Mary, Tipperary farm workers, left the boys behind in Ireland when John was aged three, and they travelled as Bounty immigrants to the Colony of New South Wales, going on to settle at Meroo, near Mudgee.

The Bounty system gave free passage to suitable candidates from the British Isles. Those considered most suitable were young married couples without children. In fact, a family qualified for free passage only if it had no more than two children under seven and no more than three under ten years of age.



John Wall

The emigrant Walls satisfied those criteria. Although the regulations stated that no child under 18 years of age was to be left behind, this is what impoverished families were often forced to do and what anxious parents felt compelled to do because of high infant mortality on emigrant ships. Hopes were invariably held for later reunion, once the parents were settled and had saved the passage money.

When collecting the Voluntary Statements across the Colony in 1845 and early 1846, Caroline Chisholm encountered many separated families. She convinced Governor Gipps to call for families separated by the Bounty system to lodge applications for assistance in bringing out the children left behind. This was done in mid 1846, and the names and (last known) addresses of the children were forwarded to London. The British bureaucracy, while initially not in favour of the Governor's largesse, conceded to his and Mrs Chisholm's combined advocacy, and the earlier implied undertaking was honoured.

At the age of ten and eight respectively, John and Thomas Wall arrived at Meroo. We must

imagine the rejoicing of the reunited family for no written record exists, nor does the "getting to know you" of siblings born in the Colony. John was an enterprising fellow. As a teenager he looked after stock in Mudgee and at a pioneering station in Queensland. He then ran a hotel, returned to farming, took up butchering, did some gold digging, went back to hotel keeping, tried tin mining, and finally settled on a Mudgee farm of 80 acres with a sideline as a "book agent" for a Sydney firm. Whew!



Emma Wall

Thomas did not get to emulate his older brother. He drowned in the Mudgee River before his thirteenth birthday.

John's image shows him in late middle-age. In her image, Emma Wall is of uncertain age. What is known, from the family history, is that John and Emma married in 1859 at Mudgee. Her past was colonially colourful. She was born to a convict mother in the Female Factory at Parramatta, and her father was a police inspector. At the time, this was judged an irregularity and Emma's upbringing was probably quite turbulent. Way leads on to way, and John and Emma met, married and were fruitful, having eight children.

One of these was Frances, born in 1869. The 1892 (?) image shows her in a sombre mood. Bad news, relates the family history. The following year Frances died of tuberculosis.



Frances Wall

In the wide, brown land of opportunity, as elsewhere, sorrows and joys are found. And for both, united families help, not hinder.

Thanks to Peter Mara, the family historian, and his brother John.

A Saviour of Living Cargoes Book Review (continued)

Finally, and on a deeply personal note, another breakthrough is the identification by date (October, 1831) and name (Caroline) of the first born of Caroline and Archibald, who died aged three weeks. This leaves unknown only one of their three children who died in infancy, Joanne Bogle's research having previously named Sarah, who died aged six months in August, 1850.

While not all of Dr Walker's deconstructions and alternate interpretations are equally convincing, her even-handed presentation draws the reader into weighing and measuring the evidence. There is no hectoring but, as Dickens himself might have said, an adequacy of argument and a sufficiency of footnotes.

This new biography of Caroline Chisholm is a commendable addition to Chisholm studies. It is published in Australia by Australian Scholarly Publishing (RRP \$44) and in England by Wolds Publishing Limited (£14.99), 256 pages.

Rodney Stinson

News snippet: The Anglican Church of St Sepulchre's in Northampton, where Caroline Chisholm was baptised and married, has recently commissioned a stained glass window commemorating her life and work.

Record of Favors Received Friends' Initiative

The Editorial in this newsletter refers to the past absence of a system to record answers received to prayers for Caroline Chisholm's intercession. One of the Friends' objectives (listed in the first newsletter) is accepting and storing written advice of favors received.

As advice comes to hand, brief details will in future be included in the newsletter and later on the www.mrschisholm.com website. The Friends have previously been informed about:

- ◇ a restless young man who finally settled down, completed his studies, married and lives happily with his wife and first-born;
- ◇ a mother's request being heard the day after she was given and said the approved prayer, for her daughter had found work;
- ◇ a middle-aged worker was chosen, against the odds, for full-time Enrolled Nurse training and is now helping disturbed families and kids; and
- ◇ fractured family relationships that are on the mend.

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I enclose a cheque for \$25 for two years' membership. Please email my copies of the Newsletter to _____

_____ OR send to postal address Yes/No

Please send me five/ten prayer cards at no cost Yes/No For bulk supplies go to www.mrschisholm.com

I am interested in actively helping the Friends. Please phone me on _____

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