

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's  
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service  
on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June 1977 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating John Burdett Wittenoom and the Wittenoom Family

Citation by Mr. A.E. Williams, B.A., B.Ed., M.A.C.E., Th.A.

Of Dutch origin the Wittenoom family reached England during the time of William of Orange and Mary - the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

John Burdett came to the Swan River in the "Wanstead" of 365 tons in early 1830. With him arrived his mother; his sister Eliza Burdett, and five motherless sons - Edward, John, Henry, Frederick and Charles. John was then only 41; in the prime of life. He was a former graduate of Brasenose College, Oxford; a former Southampton parish rector; a University lecturer; a Headmaster of 15 years standing. Such were the academic achievement of this new colonist. As Colonial Chaplain he earned a mere 250 Pounds a year. Because, he said of his long hours of work and travelling, Governor James Stirling soon increased this to 350 Pounds. He also awarded him the princely garage allowance of 2/6 a week for his long-suffering horse.

Wittenoom was only off the boat at Fremantle for 14- days before he set about building Perth's first church. He cited it, 'appropriately enough on a later University campus, the corner of Irwin and Howick (later Hay) Streets. It was built out of rushes: soldiers of the 63rd Regiment helped in its erection. For seven years it was Perth's only Anglican building. On weekdays it was used as a School.

Wittenoom visited his scattered parishioners at Fremantle, Perth and Guildford as often as possible.

In 1835 and 1842 he worshipped with them at Albany. His journeys here took him several weeks through virgin bush. He steered by the stars and compass and saw only an occasional homestead on Captain Bannister's old track.

In 1837 the "rush-church" was sold to the Fremantle Whaling Company, and reerected as living quarters on Carnac Island. So he continued his pastoral and educational work in a new Court House, which still stands in the Treasury Gardens. His school curriculum included Latin and Greek, much moral education and considerable divinity. Such was the best educational thought in the Colony at the time.

In 1839 he married again to a Miss Mary Watson Helms; and this happy union produced three more children.

Wittenoom had earlier taken up 5000 acres of land inland on the Avon. This property at Gwambygine near York, eventually became 9000 acres; one of the best and well-known properties in the Colony.

He lived in Perth in a two-storied house (he brought the frame out from England) on the present site of the Weld Club in Barrack Street. His dwelling was roofed with slate; people referred to it as "the best house in town". Bricks for it were made and burnt on the actual block. The Wittenoom sons and daughters acted as labourers for this building. John wheeled the bricks along with the rest. Close by his house towards the present Esplanade he planted 12

mulberry trees which grew and flourished. Naturally Perth's "heathens" soon referred to them as the Twelve Apostles.

A tablet commemorating John Burdett Wittenoom's life and work can be found - I hope you see it this afternoon - in our present St. George's Cathedral, Perth. It came from the old Cathedral of 1845 and was transferred to the present one in 1880. It bears this inscription:

The Rev. John Burdett Wittenoom, M.A., who for a quarter of a century discharged the sacred duties of Chaplain to this Territory, and officiated as Minister to this Church from its erection to his decease, and under whose Ministry, amidst the struggles and privations of an infant Colony, a scion of the Church of England was planted in the wilderness.

This tablet has been erected by members of the flock of which he was so long the respected pastor.

Died 23rd January, 1855

Aged 66 years

400 people, a great gathering for 1855, attended his funeral on a hot summer's day here. Shops all closed in Perth. Wittenoom was universally respected and mourned.

Scholarly, eloquent, active, conscientious, faithful and true he showed intestinal stamina and steady courage. He was a living exponent of what I like to call "muscular Christianity".

And yet, Ladies and Gentlemen, in paying due tribute to him today, let us also pay due tribute also to the Wittenoom family, who, like their founding Swan River father, have served this State faithfully in innumerable ways over many days. I cite two more Wittenooms now only -because of time - and only because I know many of you listening to me now will remember them - first, Sir Edward Wittenoom, pioneer grazier and pastoralist, the State's Agent-General in London, erstwhile Acting-Premier; second, Mr. Frederick Home Wittenoom, the Mayor of Albany for 16 years. The Wittenoom grazing and fanning and business interests, and their happy association with the Lefroy family - another great family of our State's pioneers are written in the records for all to read, and names like Yuin, Murgoo, Boolardy and Cranmore Park - historic names I mention now at random, will, no doubt remind many here of "far-off times and battles long ago".

So with thanksgiving let us remember the Wittenooms - in final words which John said during his last long lingering illness.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word"  
and again

'In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you.  
and also in the

Jubilate Deo, his favourite psalm :

"O be joyful in the Lord: all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with a song.

Be ye sure that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

O go your way into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him and speak good of His name.

For the Lord is gracious: his mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth from generation to generation".