

Issued: Tuesday, 13 March 2007

200 Years of Bible Society work in Australia

Early records show ships carrying 'precious gift of God's Word'

Although not formally established until 1817, the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society began in Australia 200 years ago next month (April, 1807).

The third annual report of the Society, which began in London in 1804, reports that, "the long arm of this benevolent Society has already reached out to the most distant posts of Empire, laden with its precious gifts of God's Word".

In its first published list of gifts, dating from April 10th, 1804, the report includes the following: "April 6 (1807), To Governor Collins, for Van Dieman's Land, 50 Bibles and 100 New Testaments." Further is reported the, "supply of 500 Bibles and 1,000 Testaments to the Rev. Samuel Marsden in 1808 and to a 'settler and schoolmaster', bound for New South Wales."

During 1836, 1,300 volumes were voted to the directors of the South Australian Church Committee, to the British and Foreign School Society and to friends and correspondents leaving for the colony.

In 1837, Mr HS Spencer who lived in Albany, the first settlement of Western Australia, distributed Bibles from the Society to, "the crew of the sailing boat". When settlement took place at Swan River, the Bible Society again helped with its gifts of scripture, granting, "125 Bibles and 75 Testaments ... to individuals proceeding to this colony."

Bible distribution in other states followed, with the appointment of CJ Latrobe as Superintendent of Port Philip in 1839. He received a gift of 100 Bibles and 300 New Testaments from the London based British and Foreign Bible Society for 'distribution in his new field'.

Bible Society NSW came into being through an Act of the NSW Parliament on March 7th 1817. Bible Society NSW (then called the NSW Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society) was the first auxiliary branch in the Pacific of the Bible Society

Bible Society NSW continues the tradition of free Bible and New Testament distribution, with \$70,000 worth of scripture going to chaplains and theological students this year.

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