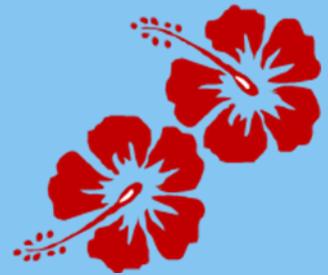


The “Bula Bulletin”



June – July 2012

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 19-20
(NRSV)

Happy 200th Birthday Revd. Hunt!!

On 13th June 2012, in Viwa Island, Fiji, leaders of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, invited guests and the villagers of Viwa Island commemorated the bi-centenary of Revd. John Hunt's birth. While all those who gathered, celebrated and gave thanks... the weather on the day was less than hospitable; dryly, it surpassed that experienced at a recent royal pageant!



Revd. John Hunt was an exceptionally dedicated and capable Methodist missionary who served in Fiji from 1838 until his death in 1848 at the age of just 36. He was a pioneer Wesleyan who translated the Bible into Fijian and gained great respect both among the chiefs of the different islands and the villagers he lived alongside. Often described as the Apostle of Fiji, John Hunt understood, listened to and loved the people (*iTaukei*) of Fiji.

Early life

John Hunt was born on 13th June 1812, the third of four children. His family lived in Hykeham Moor, near Lincoln and initially his father was employed as a bailiff (overseer) at a farm. The property changed hands, however, and the Hunt family was forced to move to Lincoln in search of work. No work was to be found and they fell upon hard times. Two years later, with the workhouse beckoning, the family moved back to their own parish at Balderton, near Newark. By the age of ten, John was a farm labourer. Six years later, as a young man, he nearly succumbed to a “brain fever”. Hunt's response was to pray earnestly to be spared.

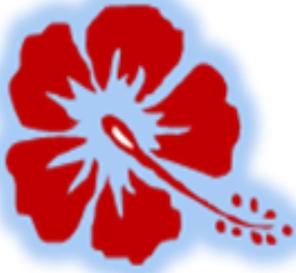
When his strength returned, John started to attend a Methodist church, though it was a little time later that he gave himself to God. At the time, Hunt was a common farm-servant, with only limited education.



John's fourth party

“I want to be more holy...”

Extract from John Hunt's journal,
7th November 1836.



Memorial to Revd. Hunt from 1985



The newly-unveiled plaque, 2012



Viwa village, Viwa Island

The isolated building on the far left of the village was Revd. Hunt's home, and is still the current minister's residence. The last building on the top right of the village, with the large sloping roof, is the John Hunt Memorial Church.



Journey of faith

John Hunt's journey of faith was rocky. He studied part time and began preaching locally, but while others praised his preaching ability, he, himself, only saw his personal failings. It was not until Revd. William Smith, a newly-appointed superintendent of the Lincoln Circuit, quizzed John whether he wished to devote his life to full-time preaching that John opened himself to the possibility of a life of service. At the time, John was 21 years of age. Subsequently, he was sent to preach at larger chapels and then to the city...

John improved considerably as a preacher, and was recommended by the Missionary Committee to study at Wesleyan Theological Institution, Hoxton. He enrolled there in September 1835. Revd. John Hunt was ordained three years later and married Hannah Summers that same year. Revd. Hunt believed his place was in mission work, probably "in the Cape" of Africa.

Pacific calling

“While Hunt's heart and mind were fixed on Africa, as the place of his future service, a great cry reached England from the far Pacific...” Rowe, 1860

Hunt was asked by the Missionary Committee to go to the South Pacific. On 29th April 1838, the mission party set sail for Sydney and after stops in Australia and Tonga, John and Hannah Hunt arrived finally in Fiji on 22nd December 1838. They were initially posted to the Mission Station at Rewa on the main island of Viti Levu, before setting up the first Mission Station on the inhospitable and much-feared Taveuni Island.

Viwa vantage

In August 1842, John and Hannah moved to Viwa, a small island off the main island of Viti Levu. At the time, Viwa was of great political importance, situated close to its neighbour, Bau Island, the powerhouse of Fiji. In Viwa Rev. Hunt was able to master the influential Bauan dialect and sit enticingly close to those in authority.

Hunt had notable success in Viwa with the conversion of Ratu Ravisa (Varani), the nephew of the island's high chief. Varani, Fijian for France, was so named after he led a raid on a passing French ship, and killed the captain and his crew. Varani "publically bowed the knee to Jehovah" on Good Friday 1845, the first truly Christian, chiefly missionary in Fiji. Later that year, Viwa was the scene for a fervent revival among its people. "The result has been most happy [...] Many who were careless and useless, have become sincere and devoted to God," said Hunt in a letter to a colleague.



Revd. John Hunt's
grave, Viwa



Guest of Honour,
Ratu Epenisa S.
Cakobau, Chief of Bau
Island



The drinking of kava as
part of the traditional
ceremony of welcome



Hard work, personal reflection and translation of the Bible

John Hunt enjoyed hard work, and confessed that he could “only live on full stretch”. Yet, as his journal illustrates, he constantly struggled with himself and his representation of his faith; he always wanted to be more Christ-like: *“I have need of true holiness. Much that is contrary to the will and nature of God remains in me. Pride, envy, malice, uncharitableness, impatience – which sometimes torments me exceedingly, and more or less every day – censoriousness, slander, evil-speaking, deceit, hypocrisy, unbelief, worldly-mindedness, lust, anger, the fear of man, want of meekness and long-suffering, or to sum up the whole, an awful want of love to God and man.”*

In early 1847 John Hunt completed the original Fijian translation of the New Testament directly and faithfully from the Greek language, helped by indigenous scholars whom he had taught. A thousand copies of the text were printed in Viwa for distribution among the eager Viwan converts.

But not satisfied with this accomplishment, Revd. Hunt continued his heavy workload. Rowe (1860) said: “If anyone wanted his help, he seemed unable to refuse it, though his work, already too great for him, was increased thereby.” There were signs, however, that his health was failing. He had angina, untreatable at the time, and by the beginning of August 1848, John was in severe and prolonged pain. Yet it was feared that his transfer back to Britain for further medical treatment would be too much for him to bear. He felt his life’s end nearing. Revd. Hunt died from dysentery and “eternal bleedings” on 4th October 1848. At the time he had begun work on translating the Old Testament into Fijian. “Slept in Jesus” Revd. Hunt was laid to rest in Viwa.

Birthday Celebrations

The current-day celebrations in Viwa, timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of John Hunt’s birth, were two-fold: to commemorate the commitments and hard work of the early missionaries in Viwa and also to relaunch the first New Testament translation by Revd. Hunt. 300 guests attended the day, and we were accompanied, and delighted, by the renowned, Suva-based Centenary Church choir. The celebrations centred around the formal welcome ceremony (*sevusevu*) and the unveiling of a plaque. Persistent heavy rain, however, prevented the closing Thanks Giving service being held in the John Hunt Memorial Church, situated on top of a steep, slippery and exposed hill, and, unfortunately, rain also caused the tarpaulin of the centre stage to collapse part way through the official welcome. Thankfully no one was hurt.

Launch of Revd. Hunt’s original New Testament translation

Many textual changes and extensive revisions to the Fijian Bible have occurred since Hunt’s original translation, resulting in much of the original text being lost.

During the last few years, a painstaking compilation of the original work has been undertaken, and the restored version of Hunt’s 1847 New Testament was

Prayers & reflections:

- Pray for the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma as it enters a new period of dialogue, openness and mission in Fiji.
- Pray for the people of Viwa Island who, having been given a rich Christian heritage, seek to sustain and promote their place in the annals of Fijian history. Pray for their guidance and spiritual growth as they plan for the future development of their community.
- Give thanks for the lives and work of missionaries past, and pray for Church historians who ensure that the mission work of their forebears is not forgotten.
- Pray for current mission workers who continue to share the 'Good News'. May they know God's presence, support and guidance at all times and in all circumstances.
- Reflect on our own spiritual journey and on our witness to others, wherever we may be and with whomever we encounter.

launched by Revd. Kanailagi at Viwa as part of the celebrations.

Pacific church historian Dr. Andrew Thornley, joint editor, with Tauga Vulaono, of the newly-compiled text said: "John Hunt's New Testament must be seen as the root of the tree from which all other revisions spring. Without knowledge of Hunt's translation, our understanding of the Fijian language of the New Testament is incomplete. The root and the branches together make up a significant tradition in the development of a Fijian literate culture and contribute to a fuller appreciation of Scripture."

The relaunch of the New Testament translation preceded a commemorative plaque being unveiled, which, in turn, was followed by the cutting of a cake using a sword presented by David Cargill, a fellow missionary, in 1839.

Unfortunately the cake suffered somewhat from the rain, but the weather did not dampen anyone's enthusiasm, nor appetite... food always featuring prominently in any Fijian celebration!

With the formal programme ended and the feasting over, those of us able headed home in open-topped dinghies (half the guests found themselves marooned overnight because of the atrocious conditions). And all who gathered, I think it is safe to say, will remember the 200th birthday celebrations of Revd. John Hunt, in Viwa, on 13th June 2012, for a very long time to come...

A sodden celebratory cake



John Hunt Memorial Church, in better weather!



The 15-minute Viwa boat transfer...



To those who encountered the tall-in-stature, convivial Revd. John Hunt, he possessed a genuine presence about him. Garrett (1982) described his appeal as "a friendly magic centred in a puzzling little book".

I wonder whether our lifestyle and presence might intrigue and appeal to others; would someone remark about us today that we too offer a 'friendly magic centred in a puzzling little book'?

God bless
Julia

**"Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples."
1 Chronicles 16: 23-24 (NRSV)**