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**Bonney, Charles Ronald (1906–2007) and
Eva (Hyde) (1905–1947); later Phyllis
Muriel (Sweet) (1927–1991)**

CHERYL CHRISTO HOWSON

Cheryl Christo Howson earned a graduate diploma in computer aided interior designing at the Dr. Bhanuben Nanavati College of Architecture for Women in Pune, India. She co-founded an interior design company in Sri Lanka and worked as a copywriter. She contributed to the morning devotional published by Women's Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the *Shepherdess International Journal* magazine, and the *Adventist Review*. She has written several plays. Currently (2020), she lives in Hosur, India while preparing for a piano exam.

Charles Ronald Bonney, whose service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church began in his native British Isles, extended to the Indian subcontinent, and concluded in the United States, distinguished himself as a teacher, pastor, radio speaker, Voice of Prophecy director, and secretary of Southern Asia Division as it was in 1962-- India, Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Pakistan (Pakistan-Bangladesh), Nepal and Bhutan.

Early Life

Charles Bonney was born May 18, 1906 in Plymouth, England,¹ to Charles and Mabel Crocker-Whiting Bonney, who also had a daughter, Dora.² Born in an Adventist home, Charles was baptized in 1920. All along Charles had the privilege of Adventist education, beginning with Plymouth Church School and graduating from Stanborough College (now Newbold College) with the completion of ministerial studies.³

Bonney married Eva Hyde on April 28, 1932.⁴ Eva was born in Devon, England, on July 2, 1905⁵ to Elizabeth and John Hyde who accepted the Adventist message in 1894 after getting to read the *Present Truth*. The newly married couple settled in England where he was active in ministry and she, a 1926 elementary education graduate from Stanborough Park College, served as a teacher at West London church school, and later acted as head teacher at Stanborough Park and Plymouth Church Schools.⁶ On July 1, 1936 the Bonneys became the proud parents of twins, Paul and Julia Ann.⁷ However, eleven years later, on February 14, after nearly 15 years of marriage, tragedy struck the Bonney family when Eva passed away. She was laid to rest in the North Watford Cemetery on Friday⁸

A year later, Bonney met Phyllis Muriel Sweet, and they got married on June 1, 1948. Phyllis was born in Bristol, England on April 5, 1927⁹ to Gladys and Frank Garfield Sweet. She and her siblings, Ronald and Glenys,¹⁰ grew up as third-generation Adventists; her grandparents had first accepted the message in 1912.¹¹

Phyllis attended Newbold College and studied for 3 years as a Bible Worker. Musically gifted, she obtained her LRAM (Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music) at the B.A. School of Music. She also obtained an LTCL (Licentiate of Trinity College London) and FTCL (Fellowship of Trinity College London) in piano and voice, which qualified her to teach music.¹² In 1961 she scored the highest in the whole of India for the L.T.C.L. teachers' diploma in singing.¹³ She was described as having "a voice of rare clarity and purity of tone."¹⁴

Before her marriage, Phyllis worked as the secretary to the Principal of Newbold College and as a Bible Instructor. After getting married to Charles Bonney, they made their home in England where they welcomed their children: Maria Elizabeth born in Bristol on August 15, 1950, and Stephen Ronald born in Watford on April 7, 1955.¹⁵

Ministry

Bonney began his denominational service on June 1, 1931 in South England. From 1932 to 1950 he served as an evangelist and district leader in the British Union. He was ordained on July 29, 1939. Eight years later tragedy struck him with the untimely passing away of Eva Bonney.¹⁶

In 1950, C. R. Bonney was appointed the director of The Voice of Prophecy Correspondence School in England and the radio broadcast relayed from Radio Luxembourg.¹⁷ Under his vigorous leadership that spanned eight years, the school grew to offer six courses, including one on health.¹⁸ The Voice of Prophecy Radio was also fortunate to have his second wife, Phyllis Bonney, whose intensely clear soprano voice enriched the musical part of the program.

At the 1958 General Conference Session, Pastor Bonney was appointed Director of Voice of Prophecy and Radio Ministry of the Southern Asia Division. The Bonneys arrived in India late 1958 with their two younger children, Maria and Stephen.¹⁹ Bonney immediately plunged into strengthening the Voice of Prophecy correspondence school, introducing new courses, and setting up Bible courses in local languages, and expanding the radio ministry to reach out to vast millions to hear the gospel in their native tongue. Within a year, the correspondence school reached its first one million mark of applicants. More branch schools were opened, resulting in the reaching of the second million in only four years.²⁰ In addition to Voice of Prophecy ministry, Bonney also served as the Temperance Secretary for 2 years from 1960-62.²¹

At the 1962 General Conference Session in San Francisco, Bonney was elected the Secretary of the Southern Asia Division in which capacity he served until 1966.²² With R. S. Lowry as president, Bonney as secretary, and C. B. Guild as the treasurer, the three new officers of the Southern Asia Division initiated new approaches and fundamental changes in the Division administration and structure so as to promote and develop national talents in administration and leadership in order to prepare the field for the day when leadership will shift from expatriate to national hands.

While Bonney continued to foster the growth of church administration, his wife Phyllis used her musical talents and expertise to build good will for the Adventist church in the community. In addition to teaching music at Spicer Memorial College (Spicer Adventist University), about 13 km from where they lived at the Division headquarters in

Poona (Pune), Phyllis gave live broadcasts over All India Radio.²³

In 1966 the Bonneys attended the General Conference session at Detroit²⁴ where they decided to move to the USA permanently. The family, including Maria and Stephen, moved in mid August to Willits, California, where Elder Bonney was appointed pastor of the Willits Church.²⁵ They later settled in Napa Valley, California, where he served as the pastor of St. Helena Church.²⁶ In 1971 he was elected to the St. Helena Hospital board for 3 years.²⁷ Finally, he served as Pastor of the Elmshaven Church at Deer Park, Napa Valley, California, for four years until he retired in 1973.²⁸

Later Life

The Bonneys continued living in St. Helena, attending the Elmshaven Church. Elder Bonney also taught part time in the religion department at Pacific Union College,²⁹ while Phyllis served as music minister and organized various musical programs.³⁰ In 1978, Bonney retired fully from teaching, although he continued to indulge in his hobbies of preaching and fruit-growing.³¹

Charles Bonney outlived both his wives; Phyllis passed away on October 29, 1991 in Loma Linda, California.³² He went on to reach the age of 101 when he breathed his last, on July 8, 2007, at home in Gentry, Arkansas, where his son Paul was living.³³

Contribution and Legacy

Charles Bonney will be remembered for his years of contribution for the development of Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondence School and the related radio ministry in England and in Southern Asia. He also contributed much as an evangelist, teacher, pastor in various churches, and as pastor of pastors in England, Southern Asia Division, and the United States.³⁴ Bonney's service as secretary of Southern Asia Division contributed much to the development of administrative, evangelistic, and pastoral leadership throughout the Division. Phyllis Bonney's musical talents perfectly complemented whatever post he served. She sang for the radio recordings when he was a director of the Voice of Prophecy;³⁵ when he spoke at meetings she would often organize the music;³⁶ and wherever he served as pastor or administrator she would conduct the choir and plan music programs to great acclaim.³⁷ Charles and Phyllis Bonney's ministry extended from the British Isles to India, Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Pakistan (Pakistan, Bangladesh), Nepal, Bhutan and the United States.³⁸

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