

# Down, David Kyrle (1918–2018)

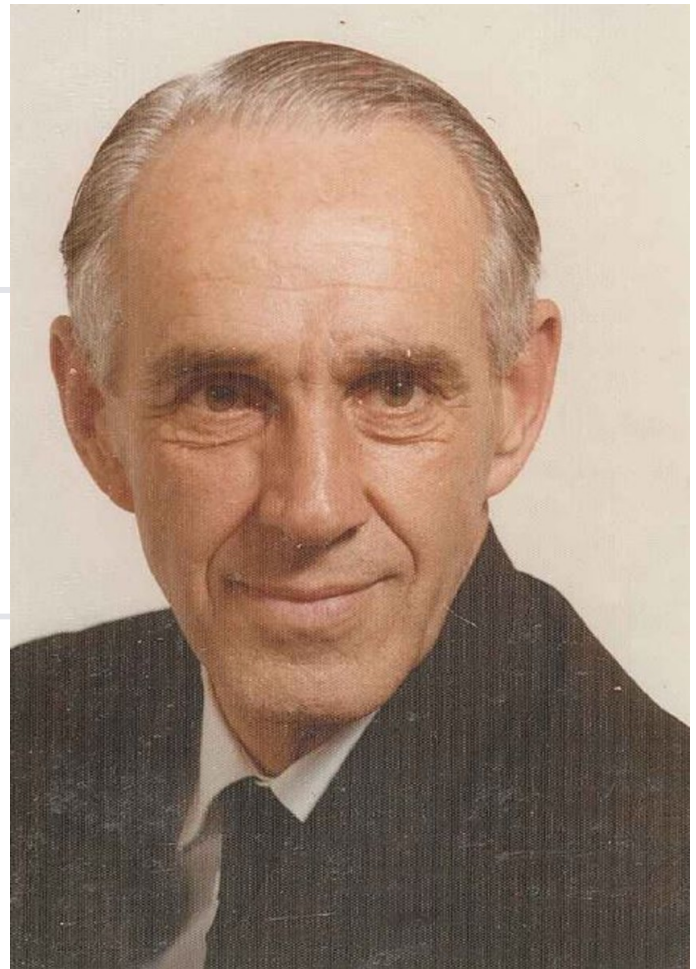
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## MICHELLE DOWN

Michelle Down, M.A. (CSU, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia) retired in 2018 as director of Library Services at Avondale College of Higher Education. She spent the first 18 years of her life in India before returning to her homeland, Australia. Michelle writes regularly for *Guide* magazine and in retirement is involved with several volunteer projects, including coordinating an eBook publishing course for seniors.

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David Kyrle Down was a missionary, evangelist, pastor, and author from Australia. Down was well known in the secular world, as well as in Adventist circles, for his knowledge of biblical archaeology. Down authored a correspondence Bible course based on archaeology. He and a crew from the Adventist Media Centre traveled to the Middle East and filmed an evangelistic series on location that they called *Digging Up the Past*.



David Down in his fifties.

Photo courtesy of Michelle Ward.

## Early Life

David Kyrle Down was born in Preston, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, on April 9, 1918, the son of Lesley Kyrle Down (1890–1934) and Mabel Taylor Kerr (1891–1973). His grandfather, Percy Kyrle Down (1865–1954), was married to Eva (1867–1942), who became a Seventh-day Adventist at the age of 57. Percy had no time for religion, but was a good man who never drank or smoked. He eventually became a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) when he was 89 years old.<sup>1</sup> A street in the suburb of Preston, Down Street, is named after him.<sup>2</sup>

Les Down died of pneumonia when David was only 16 years old. Les had been a successful business man, but was not so successful at the races, or at curbing his drinking habit.<sup>3</sup> As creditors took everything they possessed after the death of his father,<sup>4</sup> David had to leave school to help support his mother and younger sister, Peg (1927–2011) (who married Fred Nash [1920–1990]; she and Fred were missionary teachers in India)<sup>5</sup> When World War II loomed, David left work to join the army, becoming a lieutenant.<sup>6</sup>

However, David's life direction changed when he became a Seventh-day Adventist after attending an evangelistic series run by J. B. Conley in 1940.<sup>7</sup> As a result, David's mother disowned him, and his wealthy uncle cut him out of his will,<sup>8</sup> but David stayed firm and enrolled at Avondale College to do the theology course, finishing in 1944.<sup>9</sup>

## Early Ministry (1945–1952)

David's first appointment was to Lismore in 1945,<sup>10</sup> where he again met Goldie Scarr, whom he had known at Avondale. They were married in Lismore by Harold J. Myers on September 8, 1946.<sup>11</sup> David was passionate about winning souls and saw his calling as an evangelist. Records indicate that his first series was held in Ballina, where he opened with the title "Is World Peace Imminent?"<sup>12</sup>

In 1948 David was sent to New Zealand, where he held an evangelistic series in Auckland with upward of 25 people baptized.<sup>13</sup> A feature of the meetings was the children's choir, conducted by 12-year-old John Chermiside.<sup>14</sup>

Further series were held in Feilding, in the Tivoli Theatre (1950),<sup>15</sup> and in the Regent Theatre in Palmerston North (1951).<sup>16</sup> David was ordained in Auckland in 1951.<sup>17</sup> After four years in New Zealand the family returned to Australia and were stationed in Gympie in 1952 and then Bundaberg in 1953.<sup>18</sup>

## Missionary Service (1953–1973)

They were in Bundaberg for only a couple of months before they were called to Calcutta, India,<sup>19</sup> leaving March 31 on the Stratheden and arriving in Bombay on April 16, 1953.<sup>20</sup>

David started work right away with his first evangelistic series held in the Menoka Cinema,<sup>21</sup> which thousands attended.<sup>22</sup> A baptism was held in 1954 in which 82 people were baptized,<sup>23</sup> four of them Hindu.<sup>24</sup> Another series was held in 1955 in the compound of the English church in 36 Park Street, Calcutta, assisted by Lyn Burns.<sup>25</sup>

David held meetings in Shillong, Assam, in 1955 and 1956,<sup>26</sup> and Patna in 1957.<sup>27</sup> By now the Downs were due a furlough, and David decided to take the family from India to England by Jeep and homemade caravan,<sup>28</sup> visiting the lands of the Bible en route. It was a hazardous trip, as tourists were rare in that era, but Goldie wrote a book about their adventures,<sup>29</sup> and the experience whetted David's appetite for archaeology. He wrote a series of articles for the Southern Asia Tidings about their trip.<sup>30</sup>

The family now settled in Ranchi (1959–1960) and David obtained a metal "tabernacle" in which to hold his meetings.<sup>31</sup> The next move was back to Calcutta for three years<sup>32</sup> before taking another furlough in Australia in 1964. David lectured in the Theology Department at Avondale College during this time.<sup>33</sup>

The family settled in Saharanpur on their return to India<sup>34</sup> for two years, 1965–1966. In 1967 they were stationed in Roorkee,<sup>35</sup> and David led a group of Indian ministers on a one-month tour of the Bible lands, which was cut short because of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.<sup>36</sup>

Dehra Dun was the next appointment in 1968–1969 and it was here that David ran a training school for seven young workers along with his evangelistic series.<sup>37</sup>

In March 1969 David and the family drove by car and caravan again<sup>38</sup> to England and then flew to America, where David completed a semester of archaeological studies at Andrews University under Siegfried Horn.<sup>39</sup> From 1970 to 1972 the family were in Hubli, and then Bangalore.<sup>40</sup>

## Australian Ministry (1973–1982)

David returned to Australia on permanent return in February 1973, where he was appointed the pastor of Woollahra church, Sydney.<sup>41</sup> He held meetings in Petersham, Paddington, Bondi, and Woollahra<sup>42</sup> before running a series in the Sydney Opera House in 1976.<sup>43</sup> Tickets had to be purchased to attend the opera house meetings, which enabled them to be self-supporting, and David ran programs each July in the opera house for the next 21 years.<sup>44</sup> David also pastored Stanmore church and ended his working life as pastor of the Richmond and Windsor churches, 1980–1982.<sup>45</sup>

## Retirement (1983–2018)

David retired in 1983<sup>46</sup> and became busier than ever, leading yearly tours to the Bible lands, preaching on Sabbaths, running programs in the opera house, and running a number of series of meetings, by invitation, in New Zealand, Russia, Canada, and all over Australia.<sup>47</sup> He lectured at the Hornsby TAFE adult education classes for a few years, founded an archaeological club with chapters all over Australia, and in 1984 began a small black-and-white magazine entitled Diggings.<sup>48</sup> Ten years later he launched a glossy color magazine, Archaeological Diggings,<sup>49</sup> which remained in publication for 22 years.<sup>50</sup>

In 1985 David authored a correspondence Bible course based on archaeology called Digging Up the Past, produced by the Adventist Media Centre. Six thousand were printed in January and by November they were into their second print run.<sup>51</sup> It was their most popular course for many years.<sup>52</sup> The course was advertised in Reader's Digest in 1986, and more than 2,400 people requested the series, with 45 percent continuing with other courses offered by the Adventist Media Centre.<sup>53</sup>

David's knowledge and enthusiasm for archaeology grew, and in 1987 he and a crew from the Adventist Media Centre traveled to the Middle East and filmed an evangelistic series on location that they called Digging Up the Past.<sup>54</sup> There were 27 episodes, and they proved to be popular with audiences both in Australia and overseas, and were often aired on Hope Channel and 3ABN, as well as Adventist World Radio.<sup>55</sup> David, at his request, received no remuneration for any of these programs, and any money earned from his tours was likewise put into outreach work.<sup>56</sup>

David was aware that accepted Egyptian chronology did not support the biblical account, and supported the chronology proposed by Loma Linda University scholar Donovan Courville.<sup>57</sup> In 2006 he collaborated with John Ashton in writing a book titled *Unwrapping the Pharaohs*,<sup>58</sup> which went into a second print. This was followed by *The Archaeology Book* in 2010<sup>59</sup> and *Unveiling the Kings of Israel* in 2011.<sup>60</sup>

Goldie Down died in 2003,<sup>61</sup> and David married his former sweetheart, Lorna Harrison (Stevens).<sup>62</sup> David was still active into his early 90s, but failing eyesight eventually prevented him from continuing his ministry. He died in Alton Lodge on March 16, 2018, just three weeks short of his 100th birthday.<sup>63</sup>

## Legacy

Sometimes referred to as “Mr. Archaeology,” David became well known in the secular world, as well as in Adventist circles, for his knowledge of biblical archaeology. Local newspapers reported on his activities, and he was a popular presenter at events such as Creation science conferences and Rotary clubs and was once interviewed on the Ray Martin Midday Show. He was regularly interviewed on radio by Gordon Moyes from the Wesley Mission and wrote often for *Creation* magazine. He conducted “digs” after each tour and became well known and respected by Israeli archaeologists.<sup>64</sup>

David never missed an opportunity to witness, and he regarded the tours, videos, interviews, magazines, articles, and books as his way of promoting the Bible and its teachings. Many can trace their interest in the SDA Church to the videos they watched or the articles they read about archaeology.<sup>65</sup>

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