

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING, 19th JUNE, 1986

Dr. K. Manley opened the meeting in prayer at 8.00 p.m. with thirty-six members and visitors in attendance. Apologies were received and accepted from Miss H. Burton, Mr. J. Church, Mrs. L. McDonald, Mrs. G. Marsh, Mrs. L. Ollif, Mr. P. Young and Mrs. H. Willick.

The Chairman extended a special welcome to Dr. D. Parker, Chairman of the Queensland Baptist Historical Society, who later in the meeting brought a greeting from his society.

Dr. Manley then outlined the programme of meetings for the remainder of the year.

Correspondence

The Secretary advised that information concerning the annual conference of the Social Histories Society had been received and this was noted.

Treasurer's Report

The financial report presented by the Treasurer, showing the following balances for the period ended 19th June, 1986, was accepted. :

General Fund	\$ 990.98
Publication Fund	2,224.14
Essay Competition Fund	87.09

Mr. Petras gave details of an amount of \$100 shown as a payment in the general fund for travelling expenses. The Treasurer advised that as some members would be aware, the Chairman would be travelling to Singapore shortly to address a meeting of the Baptist Heritage Commission and members of the Executive felt that a contribution towards Dr. Manley's expenses was appropriate. The decision of the Executive was ratified by Members. Dr. Manley in thanking the Society for the donation said that he hoped to bring a report on the Conference to the next meeting.

Rev. H. Evans inquired of the Treasurer as to the number of the Society's publications still unsold and the possibility of selling the balance at reduced prices. Following a comment by Mr. Petras about the Society's next publication, the Chairman said that this was a matter which could be looked at by the Executive at a later date.

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There being no general business, Dr. K. Manley then addressed the meeting on the subject "Highlights in the Story of the Central Baptist Church, 1836-1986."

At the conclusion of his address Dr. Manley answered questions raised by Members and several members from the Central Baptist Church who were present gave their recollections of past events at the Church.

The meeting was then closed in prayer.

O.C. Nannelli, Secretary.

AN INTERESTING NOTE FROM BATHURST.

The Bathurst Technical College opened in April 1885 with five classes and eighty-four students. It met in the town's School of Arts, but the building was not large enough to contain all the classes and the Drawing Class was "held in a room at the back of the Baptist Church in Keppel Street." There can be little doubt that this was the Sunday School Hall, the first Baptist building west of the Dividing Range. It was at the Bathurst Technical College that Rev. Dr. C. J. Tinsley commenced his post-elementary education.

The quotation given above comes from "The Story of Bathurst" ed. B. Greaves.

The June Lecture

FLASHBACKS FOR A SESQUI-CENTENARY

DR. MANLEY PRESENTS HIGHLIGHTS IN THE STORY OF CENTRAL

Dr. Manley is preparing an official history for Sydney's Central Baptist Church as part of its celebrations of 150 years of witness. He spoke of the discoveries he has made from the records of the Church which have been well preserved and which he found most illuminating. Amongst these records is the original Church Roll, a huge leather-bound book commenced by Rev. J. Saunders. It is in excellent condition and remains the current Roll Book of the Church. Church officers had brought it to the meeting and it aroused considerable interest, especially for some present who searched for family records.

Central Church has a particular interest for all Australian Baptists as the oldest Baptist Church in Australia with a continuous history. Only one Church had an earlier date of formation, Harrington Street, Hobart, formed with five members on 14th June 1835. Whereas Bathurst Street in Sydney had a building before a membership was formed, Harrington Street waited until 1841 before erecting its building.

Dr. Manley said it was impossible to deal with the whole of the history of the Church in one evening and he would confine himself to some highlights and would relate those highlights to the eighteen pastors the Church had had. Amongst these pastors Rev. W.L. Jarvis under whom the present building was erected, with a seventeen years pastorate, served for the longest term.

The land on which the Bathurst Street Church was erected had been granted to the unfortunate Rev. J. McKaeg, first Baptist preacher in Sydney, but the building had to await the coming of Rev. John Saunders, the first minister of the Church. The chapel was opened on 23rd September 1836 and the Church formed on 15th December in that year.

John Saunders, trained as a solicitor, was a man of missionary vision. He was concerned for the spiritual welfare of the city and of the settlements beyond. He was not a conventional Baptist minister and to establish his Church was prepared to accept as members such of his keen supporters as would make the required confession of faith. Baptism was not essential so for many years the Church had open membership. Yet he encouraged the gathering together of Baptists in other centres of settlement particularly at Wollongong, Liverpool, Smithfield and Parramatta, and from time to time spent a Sunday preaching at such gatherings. He had a keen interest in social issues especially temperance and education and made a considerable impact on the faction-ridden society of Sydney where he was highly respected. Congregations filled the chapel, built to seat 400, and a gallery had to be added. In 1846 a school house was built beside the Church.

His successor, Rev. J. Ham, who was plagued with ill-health and died in 1852, did an effective work in building up the membership during his four year ministry.

The third pastor, Rev. James Voller, 1854-1870, the second longest serving pastor, was concerned to build up the Baptist witness. During his sixteen years at Bathurst Street he proved a strong leader and was a good organizer. To carry out his vision of establishing Baptist causes he formed a Preachers' Association which served six centres, a Colonial Missionary Society to assist new causes, and complained to English Baptists about the lack of support given to the spiritual needs of migrants to the colonies. He was always ready to debate publicly on the subject of Believer's Baptism especially in Queensland which he visited from time to time in the interests of establishing Baptist causes. From Bathurst Street he went to a pastorate in Brisbane where he was a notable stalwart in denominational activities. Finally he returned to Sydney and was, for a time, Secretary of the Baptist Union. Dr. Manley summed him up as a significant and impressive figure.

Rev. James Greenwood, M.A., 1870-76, was vitally interested in educational issues. He proposed the establishment of a Theological College to train men for the ministry, but the main interest is to be found in what he did outside the Church. Keenly interested in politics he campaigned vigorously for a more efficient and unsectarian system of education. He was the author of the Manifesto published by the Public Schools League and in 1876 he resigned the pastorate and the Christian ministry to become the M.L.A. for East Sydney, a seat he held from 1877 to 1880. He eventually served on the staff of the Sydney Morning Herald. Dr. Manley considered it a sad footnote to his life that he publicly stated that he found Baptist theology restrictive and that he was able to lecture on Free Thought.

After glancing at advances made under the ministries of Revs. P.H. Cornford and Wm. Clare, Dr. Manley referred briefly to the strong evangelistic ministry of Rev. Chas. Bright, 1885-92, which covered the period of the Jubilee and the creation of the Jubilee Fund for extension work. They were good years in which a Tract Society was formed, the Y.P.S.C.E. introduced, the Church building renovated and the pipe organ installed.

During the ministry of Rev. F.E. Harry, 1892-99, deaconesses were introduced to the Church and missionary interests highlighted. Two of his daughters went to the field in East Bengal (Bangladesh today).

Rev. J.A. Soper, 1900-1902, wished to hold evening services in a theatre as an evangelistic thrust but the Church was unwilling.

The ministry of Rev. James Barker, covering twelve years, 1902-1914, was a significant one, especially in regard to Open-Air evangelism and the appointment of Miss Sarah Green as a Bible Woman whose main task was to assist in visitation. A Mothers' Club, conducted by Miss Green, attracted about one hundred women. After nine years of service Miss Green died in an Open Air Meeting. Discussions with the Baptist Union about building a Church House on the Bathurst Street site began in 1906.

The years of the Great War were difficult ones but the Church was guided through this period by one of its outstanding officers, Miss A. Angwin. There was drift to the suburbs and the only pastor, Rev. J. Parker, served for only eighteen months and then went to the Y.M.C.A..

The next pastorate brought happier times. Rev. John Complin, 1920-30, was a keen evangelist and had been for a time the denominational evangelist. Open Air services were held every night with the assistance of a band of keen men whom he gathered around him. Another evidence of outreach was the establishment of a branch Church at Blacktown. It was during Mr. Complin's ministry that the name of the Church was changed from Bathurst Street to Central Baptist.

In a period between terms of missionary service in India, Rev. Walter Barry, 1931-33, ministered during the tough years of the Depression.

With the Rev. Wilfred Jarvis, 1933-51, Dr. Manley considered that the great highlight of the Church was reached. When his ministry began the Church was at a low ebb with a membership of 93. By 1938 it had reached 163 and it reached its peak in 1946 with 333 members. It was an exciting ministry and among its many features those that drew attention were the strong emphasis on evangelism, the aggressive use of Christian Endeavour, the move to George Street, the leading of the denomination into the formation of the Baptist National Service Auxiliary, and the establishment of the Christian Workers Training College. Mr. Jarvis was a man who had mastered many skills all of which were used in his evangelistic work. He was a man of outstanding eloquence, a born leader and an efficient and

energetic organizer. He won the support of the Church for his prophetic preaching, his evangelistic emphasis, his social concern and for his organizing efforts. Following upon the organization of outstanding Centenary Celebrations came the intricate negotiations with the Government for the enforced removal from Bathurst Street to George Street followed by the erection of the present building in co-operation with the Baptist Union. The year 1939 brought two important events in the life of the Church : the induction of Wilfred Jarvis as President of the Baptist Union and the outbreak of World War II, both in the same month. They were most significant years. As President of the Union Mr. Jarvis organized the denomination's Baptist National Service Auxiliary and Central Church became the focal point for Baptist wartime activities. The building was crowded with service men and women from the country, from interstate and from overseas, who found great help in the Friendship Hour. After the war there was a decline as service people returned to their homes, but the post-war years saw the organization of one of the great things in the history of the Church, the Christian Workers Training College.

Mr. Jarvis resigned the pastorate in 1951 and the following years saw a struggle by the Church for a role in the life of the city. It was looking for an identity and experienced both highs and lows. There have been four pastors, two for short terms. Rev. E. Watson, 1952-55, and Rev. R. Ham, 1973-76, and two with longer terms, Rev. H. Rowe, 1956-69 and the present pastor, Rev. E. Yu since 1977.

Mr. Rowe won recognition as an able expository preacher, congregations grew once more and the gallery was re-opened, but in his later years Mr. Rowe was restricted by the effects of a heart attack. After the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade over ninety references came to the Church. The Young Men's Hostel was established at this time. A proposal for a sixteen-storey building, as a basis for the expansion of the Church's ministry, represented the vision of the Church at that time although the plans collapsed. During this ministry significant groups of Asian people were attracted to the Church. To fulfil a ministry to these folk a Chinese Reading Room was opened in 1961, a Bible Class commenced and Home Study Fellowships organized. In 1965-66 the report of the Asian Department revealed that this was a very active part of the Church with Prayer Meetings, Bible Classes and an evangelistic emphasis. Mr. Yu served at this time as a student assistant.

Following Mr. Rowe's resignation in 1969, there were a number of interim pastorates until the coming of Mr. Ham, who urged the Church to rediscover its role and identity.

Under Mr. Yu Central is a thriving and live Church with an emphasis upon group ministry. Rev. F. Starr has been called as an assistant Pastor and the Church, vibrant and relevant to multi-cultural Sydney, has a bright and hopeful future.

In the period of comment and discussion that followed the close of the address a question was asked about the Church's efforts in social work. One of the facts that emerged was this that Central had given four thousand pounds to the Homes Trust to permit the building of Yallambi, the Trust's first home. The interest was more than financial as Rev. W. Jarvis had been the first President of the Homes Trust.

AN ASPIRANT FOR THE MINISTRY

THOMAS BETTS OF ESSEX

Birth 12th December, 1827
Migration to N.S.W. Left England 14th November 1849 on the "Clifton".
Arrived Sydney, 19th March, 1850.
Church Membership In England. Halstead, Essex.
In N.S.W. Bathurst Street 1850-59.
Parramatta, 1860-61.
Smithfield.
Preaching At Parramatta and Smithfield.
Death 25th September, 1869.

Thomas Betts was one of the six young men who joined the Bathurst Street Church in 1850 after having been brought out to Sydney with others by the enterprising Presbyterian, Dr. Dunmore Lang, to be trained for the ministry. In "Some Fell on Good Ground" Rev. A.C. Prior commented that of the six only one, Rev. W.H. Carey, seems to have entered the ministry. In earlier issues of the "Recorder" (June and August 1985) articles on two of these young men, William Carey and John Langley, have already appeared. We now record something of a third but what we know relates rather to his spiritual outlook than to his activities. We have only a handful of references in the Bathurst Street and Parramatta Church records, but some valuable insights in a notebook in the possession of the descendants of the eldest daughter. At one/^{end} of this notebook Thomas had made diary-type entries of events in his life prior to leaving England; in the other end is a diary of the voyage. There is a note to say that the diary is continued in another book, but unfortunately this has been lost. The family has kindly given me permission to use this material. A transcription will be placed in the Society's archives.

The first page of the diary has the heading "1846" and is followed by the first entry :-

"Baptized Sunday morning, May 24th, 1846, by Rev. W. Clements at Halstead, Essex." He was eighteen years old.

Halstead is a town at the junction of main Roads A131 and A604, and lies 18 miles north of Chelmsford and 13 miles west of Colchester. His parents lived at Weathersfield. It is obvious from the early entries that Thomas' early education had been limited, but his literacy improved rapidly after he began advanced studies. Those studies commenced almost immediately and the motivation for them is revealed in the next entry. The second entry dated June 22nd, within a month of his baptism indicates that he had left his employment and entered the home of Mr. Clements at Halstead as a student. It is a significant expression of the young man's vision. He asks :-

"What am I here for. I hope to glorify God. On this very day a special Prayer Meeting held at most all the Baptist Churches throughout the Kingdom for the very purpose I am come here for and that is that God would be pleased to raise up more young men suitable for his work. I was much refreshed at the prayer meeting this evening and may the Lord be pleased to hear the prayers of his servants and abundantly answer them by sending more labourers into his harvest for surely the harvest is very great but labourers are few. And may the Lord be pleased to pour out his Holy Spirit down upon me that I may pursue my studies that I may soon be able to be made a faithful minister of his Gospel and a faithful labourer in his harvest."

He commenced his studies the next morning but confesses that he made little progress. However he prayed that God would bless him in his studies. Succeeding entries reveal a young man not only sincere but intense in that sincerity. On his first Sunday at Halstead he was grieved at the small number present at the evening service and exclaims in his diary :

"Oh, that the Lord would stir up the minds of his people to be more active in promoting God's glory."

On the next evening he went with Mr. Clements to Pibmarsh, and rejoiced in the "delightful service". However, he is still concerned about the unresponsiveness of the people and writes :-

"Oh that the people would let the word drop into their heart and not into their ears only, but I fear they are forgetful hearers. Oh, may the Lord bless his word to the conversion of many poor immortal souls."

His keenness persists despite the fact that he did not have great success in the distribution of tracts. His second Sunday with Mr. Clements brought forth this comment :-

"Blessed be God for his great kindness to me in permitting me to see another Sabbath day. Up at six this morning. Went to Prayer Meeting at 7 o'clock. Oh, how refreshing it is to meet with the saints. . . . Oh, what a Sunday this has been for me. Heard three sermons. Oh, may I always value the Sabbath as I have done this. Oh, what shall I render unto God for all his goodness to me."

Five weeks later he describes Sunday, August 9th, as a "glorious day". He had gone with a friend, William Newton, to conduct a service at a nearby village, Gosfield. He comments that it was the first time he had ever spoken in public as he read the Scriptures and led in prayer. After noting that the people enjoyed the preaching of Mr. Newton from the text, Luke 16:26, he remains concerned that the words may not be reaching to their hearts and closes his entry for the day with the hope : "Oh, that I could see them doers of the word and not hearers only."

He stayed with Mr. Clements until July 1847, but by that time his funds were exhausted and an appeal to his friends for help had proved unsuccessful. He says : "I have been studying with great pleasure for the past year, looking forward with joy to the time when I shall be able boldly to preach Christ's Gospel to the poor perishing heathen." He had made applications to both the London Missionary Society and to the Scripture Reading Society, but both informed him that there was no opening for him at the time. He resigned himself to the inevitable : "No door seems to open for me in any way whatever. Where must I go? I must return again to my parent's humble cot where I must remain while Providence opens a door for me."

Mr. Newton, his friend from Halstead, was now at Stepney College and persuaded Thomas to make application for admission to the College. He did so, but suffered another disappointment for he was advised that "under all circumstances I could not be advantageously admitted to College." Evidence from his diaries would suggest that all three applications failed because of the inadequate standard of his elementary education.

He remained with his parents for eight months troubled by lack of employment. The failure of one prospect was a keen disappointment. He had been offered a situation as servant at Mill Hill Grammar School and looked forward to finding means there of improving his education. At the last moment the expected vacancy did not eventuate. His reaction reveals the strength of his faith :-

"Now, here was another trial of my faith, but I base my testimony to the truth of the Scriptures that as my day so my strength is. And here I would say what an unspeakable blessing it is to be permitted to carry all our troubles and burdens to the throne of Grace, and leave them there. Oh, that men would seek the favours of their Creator in their time of trouble, instead of going to the ale houses and there endeavour to lull themselves to sleep, by drinking like the greedy ox."

On March 3, 1848 he began work as a footman for a Dr. Bennett. Although it was not what he wanted he felt "I must consent because it appeared to be the Will of God." He stayed there eleven months and then returned to Mr. Clements as an articled student at a place called Little Mapleshead. Three months later

in June 1849 we have his last entry describing his sick visitation and personal work as a soul winner. There follows the statement "Continued in another book." That book is lost, and we do not know how he came to be one of the students gathered together at the end of that year by Dr. Lang to bring to Sydney for training for the ministry.

The diary of his voyage to Australia gives a graphic account of the voyage, seasickness, unpalatable food, storms, calms, heat near the equator, cold in the Indian Ocean, deaths and births on board and various frustrations. Thomas was obviously much tried by the conditions but was, always able to find a cause for praise of God and look forward to a future ministry for his Lord. The ship "Clifton" left Gravesend on November 14th 1849, picked up Dr. Lang at Deal the next day and were at sea until they reached Port Phillip on February 12th. The only sight of land mentioned were the Brazilian islands of Trinidad and Martin Voz in the South Atlantic, although it is mentioned that they passed the Cape of Good Hope on January 2nd, 1850. Classes were organized by Dr. Lang on November 28th, and his tutor was a Mr. Robb. Included in his class was Mr. Jervis, one of the six to later join Bathurst Street Church. Mr. Carry (W.H. Carey?) is mentioned as part of a debating team. Services, lectures, prayer meetings took place regularly under a number of ministers travelling on the ship. After a month in Melbourne, the ship arrived in Sydney on March 19th, 1850 and the diary closes. Nothing is told of his experiences in Sydney with Dr. Lang's Australian College, or with the Church at Bathurst Street.

Thomas was received into membership at Bathurst Street on 4th August 1850, but does not seem to have taken much part in the work there. In 1852 he was living at Smithfield having married a Smithfield girl, Mary Ann Watts, who was foundation member of the Parramatta Church. In April 1853 the Smithfield Baptists, all in membership with Bathurst Street, requested permission to commemorate the Lord's Supper regularly and proposed that James Mansfield and Thomas Betts be authorized to administer it. The Bathurst Street Church approved of James Mansfield doing so.

At the end of 1857 the pastorless Parramatta Church appointed Thomas Betts to preach every Sunday evening during 1858, but at the end of the year it was decided to discontinue the evening service. At the end of 1859 Thomas transferred to the struggling Parramatta Church and was elected Steward and Treasurer, deacons having been dispensed with.

Until his death, at the early age of 41, Thomas lived on orchards in the Smithfield area and was very attached to the Smithfield Church. Just prior to his death he wrote a letter to his wife giving instructions as to the upbringing of his children and the care of his farm. It reveals sound commonsense in secular things and a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his children.

His first four children were daughters and then he had two sons, the first of which died in infancy. Two daughters were baptized by Rev. G. Shepherd of Newtown in January 1871 and the fourth was baptized by Rev. J. Straughen at Parramatta in 1892, and became a very active member there although her husband, several times Mayor of Parramatta, was the long-serving Superintendent of St. John's Sunday School. Most of his descendants had close links with the Smithfield Church, but the daughter and two grandsons of his eldest child were prominent workers in the Parramatta Church and two daughters of his second child were Sunday School teachers at Parramatta.

The desire of Thomas Betts to be a minister or missionary was not fulfilled, but he did become a preacher and a respected Christian leader.

H.W-S.