

No. 3 of 1997 (Number 61 in present series)

July 1997

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NEXT MEETING:

When: Thursday, 7 August 1997 at 7.30 pm
Where: G H Morling Chapel, Morling College, Eastwood
Topic: "Northside"
Rev David Jones will speak on the Northside Church Centenary.

The Society's Officers:

Chairman
Rev E R Rogers
119 Midson Road
Epping 2121
Telephone 9876 2277

Secretary
Mr O C Nannelli
9a Werona Street
Pennant Hills 2120
Telephone 9481 0477

Treasurer
Mr P E Hayward
143 Epping Road
Marsfield 2122
Telephone 9878 3447

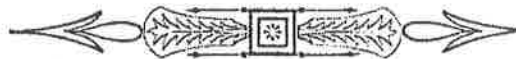
Archivist
Rev E A Archer
9 Rosebank Avenue
Epping 2121
Telephone 9876 2266

Editor: The Recorder
Rev P B Kilkeary
PO Box 586
Strathfield 2135
Telephone 9642 6862

Report of May 1997 Meeting

Following the formal business, during which all office bearers were re-elected, the Chapel was filled with the sound of enthusiastic Baptists proclaiming "These are our Songs".

Twenty songs were sung under the leadership of Ron Rogers, Ted Archer and Laurie Le-Claire, beginning with "Blessed be the tie that binds" and concluding with "Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing". Our songs included both the much loved traditional hymns and contemporary hymns.



Concerning Presidents from Country Churches

Contributed by H Watkin-Smith



The importance of our country Churches is frequently underestimated by present members of city and suburban Churches. This is so despite the fact that many leaders in Churches within the present metropolitan area come from country Churches or are children of members in country Churches. In some of our country Churches today heroic efforts are being made by their officers and members. Moreover, much of the sacrificial service to Baptist witness in NSW in earlier days was given by pastors whose great aim was the extension of that witness to farming communities and to small towns servicing farmers and miners. This fact was acknowledged by the election as Union President of four country pastors in the first ten years of the Union's existence. On the other hand in the 128 years of the Union's existence there have been only nineteen terms served by non-metropolitan presidents, namely fourteen pastors and four Church members, one of the pastors, Seth Jones, being twice president.

Who are these Eighteen Country Presidents?

1869	Rev Philip Lane of Hinton
1870	Rev Robert Morton of Newcastle
1874-75	Rev Josiah T Hinton of Orange
1877-78	Rev A W Grant of Bathurst
1881-82	Rev R F Becher of Grafton
1896-97	Rev Seth Jones of Newcastle
1903-04	Rev Seth Jones of Newcastle
1909-10	Mr George W Griffiths of Manildra
1922-23	Mr George Searl of Dungog
1925-26	Rev F J Dunkley of Wellington
1933-34	Rev Arch Jolly of Newcastle
1947-48	Rev William Gibbins of Islington
1957-58	Rev E A Walsham of Wellington
1962-63	Mr C R (Syd) Johnson of Yeoval
1974-75	Rev J C Campbell of Ballina
1977-78	Rev E V Marks of Warilla
1981-82	Rev T H Binks of Islington
1987-88	Rev N W Adcock of Canberra
1992-93	Mr C W Caladine of Thirroul

Note Firstly

In the past 30 years five presidents have been based outside Sydney and suburbs at the time of their election. However, one of them, Rev N Adcock was pastor at Canberra, the nation's capital. The others had all



gained recognition as leaders in suburban Churches and on Union Committees; Rev J C Campbell of Ballina had a notable pastorate at Mortdale for 15 years and gave untiring service to the Theological College; Rev E V Marks of Warilla had been Home Mission Superintendent and later pastor at Bankstown for 12 years; Rev T Binks was having an outstanding ministry at Islington but previously had come to prominence for an exciting ministry at Parramatta; and Mr Caladine of Thirroul as Chairman of the Missionary Council while an officer of a suburban church.

Note Secondly

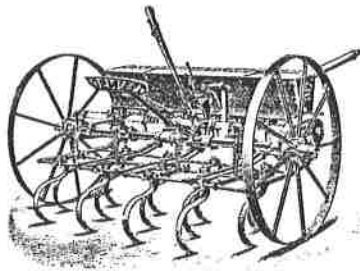
Despite the possible objection that Newcastle and its suburbs realistically cannot be called "country" today, the fact is that up to the time of Seth Jones Newcastle was a country town. What we now call the City of Greater Newcastle was in the 19th Century a small shipping and mining town surrounded by a number of villages around the pit top of coal mines and separated from them by open country, scrub, and difficult communications caused by the deplorable state of the roads connecting Newcastle to the villages. When Rev P Lane was pastor of the Newcastle Church (1864-68) and Rev R Morton succeeded him (1868-70) the population of the town approximated 1600. Certainly the population of Newcastle and the outlying villages now comprising the present city of Greater Newcastle totalled 7500, but there were at least five Baptist Churches in that area (three English-speaking, two Welsh-speaking for certain and possibly another Welsh-speaking Baptist Church).

Note Thirdly

Up to the Centenary of the Union (1968) there had been 33 laymen (so-called) elected as President of the Baptist Union. Of these only three came from the country;

Messrs George W Griffiths, George Searl and C R (Syd) Johnson. Most of the present generation would have some knowledge of the last-named. An outline of his life and work was given in the December 1993 *Baptist*. Very few of this generation will know much of the earlier two. The writer has recollections of George Searl during his presidential year (1922) when during a tour of the south-west churches he stayed in my father's manse for a few days, and also in 1925-27 in Dungog Church where Mr Searl was Church Secretary and Sunday School Superintendent.

Let us look briefly at the first two country laymen to serve as President:

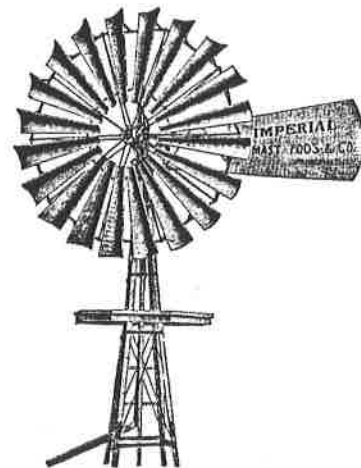


George W Griffiths who served as President for the year 1909-10 was the first country layman to serve in that position. He was a General Store Keeper at Manildra and was an officer in the Manildra Church. Mr Griffiths was born in Birmingham (12 December 1860), the second son of Mr Henry Griffiths, a wholesale manufacturing jeweller. George was educated at Edgbaston College, Birmingham, and attended the Mt Zion Chapel. He came to NSW in 1885 and married a Miss Miller of Cumnock. He settled at Garra (15 km west of Molong) as a farmer. At Garra there was a meeting of Baptists, one of several such in the district, associated with the Orange-Spring Hill Church. Rev A J Clarke, visiting the district on behalf of the Union in October 1888 set aside a young preacher, James Worboys, as Pastor for these western Churches and formed a membership of 21 members at Garra as a branch of Orange. The first baptism conducted by the newly appointed pastor, James Worboys, was at Garra and the candidate was George W Griffiths. Mr Griffiths proved a dedicated member and became a deacon of the Church, serving at various times as lay

preacher, Secretary, Treasurer and Elder of the Church.

When the railway line was extended from Molong to Parkes Mr Griffiths decided to relinquish farming and set up as a store-keeper at one of the railway stations. He selected the township of Manildra as the site for his store, opening it in 1887.

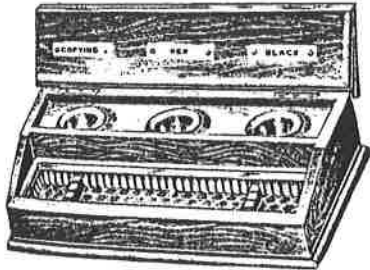
In 1890 a Church building was erected on a property of a Garra deacon, Mr Pocknall. As this was nearer the township of Pinecliffe the Garra Church became known as the Garra-Pinecliffe Church and then just as Pinecliffe. Another group of Baptists was meeting in homes at Gregra between Pinecliffe and Manildra. In 1892 a small building was erected there and a year later a Sunday School was commenced with 25 scholars.



The Superintendent was G W Griffiths, the teacher of the Senior Bible Class was A J Waldock and the third teacher was Mr F Goodman. Mr Waldock who was an employee in Mr Griffiths' store later became a Baptist minister, Home Mission Superintendent, President and President-General. Mr Griffiths gave much consecrated service to the Baptist denomination in the Western Districts and is often mentioned in reports from those centres. His wife and he were widely respected for their interest in community affairs. Mr Griffiths was secretary and later president of the Manildra Show Committee, a member of the School of Arts Committee and of the Progress Association.

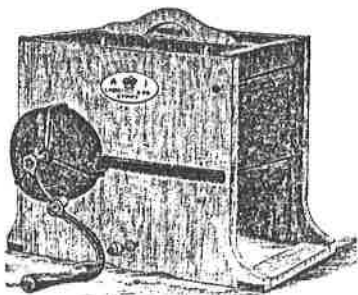
Congregations at Baptist services in Manildra varied greatly as there were strong Church prejudices in the town. No Baptist

building was erected there until 1909, opening on 24 November 1909. In the previous month the pastor, Rev W Coller, moved from the manse at Garra to his own home in Manildra. As a result of these two events Manildra became the centre for the Manildra and Garra-Pinecliffe circuit of churches.

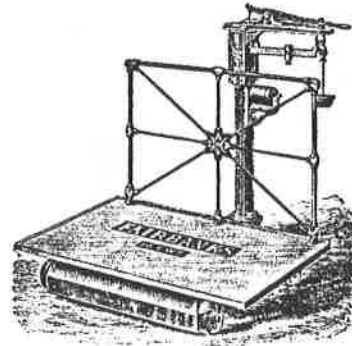


At the beginning of his presidential year Mr Griffiths made a tour of the Churches in the south-west of the state. On 25 August 1909 he shared with the Home Mission Secretary in the opening of the manse at Brocklesby and visited the township of Walla Walla where the Goombargana Church had an outstation. He was greatly taken with the prospects there and opened a general store there. One of his daughters married a local farmer, William Odewahn, who was a stalwart of the Walla Church for many years.

When the Great War broke out in 1914 he wished to play his part and joined the Red Cross, his area of service being back in England. In January 1918 it was reported that he was seriously ill in Birmingham with influenza. He died on 23 March 1918.



George Searl, President for 1922–23, had a great interest in Sunday School work and Baptist Home Missions. At the time he was Secretary of the Church at Dungog and Superintendent of the Sunday School there. He had been Secretary of the Church since its formation and had been much involved in the erection of its neat brick building and Sunday School hall. As local Scoutmaster for many years, he had an influence for good on the scouts and several of them attended his Sunday School because of their admiration for his leadership and strength of character. He was a very caring person and had many community interests and so was highly regarded in the town. He was manager of the Co-operative Dairy Factory, a member of the Dungog Show Committee and of Dungog Hospital Committee. He was much involved in various aspects and committees in the dairy industry. Other interests included the local RSL and membership of the Sydney Show Society.



George Searl's grandfather was James Searl, one of the small group of founding members of the historic Hinton Baptist Church, and a farmer in the nearby Seaham district on the Williams River. George's father, John, was a farm labourer and he had 12 children, of whom George, born July 1876, was the fifth. After 13 years on Ash Island in the Lower Hunter River, where George was born, he spent some three years in the Cessnock district and then for a time at Miller's Forest, eventually about 1884–5 settling on the Brandon Estate on the Williams River between Eskdale and Seaham. At Eskdale

where the Hinton Church had conducted an outstation for many years a Protestant Union Church had been opened in 1882 by Rev W Harvison of Hinton Baptist Church. Hinton continued to be vitally interested in Eskdale and here from about age eight or nine, George received much spiritual training. He was baptised just before his twentieth birthday at Hinton in March 1896.

George Searl's interest in and enthusiasm for the dairy processing industry had been awakened by his attendance at a school conducted by Calman's Eagleton Creamery over the river from Eskdale. In 1887 he went to Millthorpe Creamery, which he only left in 1900 to become Manager of Miller's Forest Creamery. But in 1901 he was back at Millthorpe in the dual capacity of manager of Millthorpe Creamery and manager of Mudjee Butter Rooms. He resided at Molog and while there he married Ruth Searle (no relation) of Mudjee Methodist Church in November 1901. He moved his residence to Millthorpe where he served as secretary of the Baptist Sunday School for three years.



George Searl was successful in his application to be the inaugural manager of Dungog Co-operative Butter Factory opened in November 1905. He continued in this position until September 1927 when he became Manager of Singleton Central Co-operative Co Ltd from which position he retired in 1945. He died in April 1959. His close friend, Principal G H Morling took part in his funeral service. His daughter Gladys was baptised early in life. She died about 1994 while resident at Shalom. His son Keith was baptised in Newcastle Tabernacle at age 16 and became a Sunday School teacher there.

George Searl enjoyed his presidential year, the board of his factory allowing him to accumulate his holiday leave to free him for

his presidential duties. He greatly appreciated the three weeks he spent in the churches of the Northern Rivers and the four weeks spent with the churches in the South-West of the State.

Acknowledgments:

G Griffiths

Reports in *The Australian Baptist*

George Searl

A biography by a nephew, son of John's twelfth child.

Minute books of Hinton and Dungog

Reports in *The Australian Baptist*

