

No. 4 of 1997 (Number 62 in present series) November 1997

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NEXT MEETING:
When: Thursday, 5 November 1997 at 7.30 pm
Where: G H Morling Chapel, Morling College, Eastwood
Topic: "This is my story"—Rev Eric Wykes

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
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Minutes of General Meeting Held 7 August 1997

The meeting was opened in prayer by the Chairman, Rev E R Rogers at 7.30pm with 21 members and friends in attendance.

Apologies were received and accepted from Rev N Cowling. Mr H Watkin-Smith and Mr R Robertson. A special welcome was extended to Rev David Jones who would speak later on the Centenary of the Northside Church.

Correspondence

The Secretary advised correspondence had been received from Historic Houses Trust, Baptist Union of NSW (annual calendar) and Rev David Parker, passing on material concerning Rev Alan Prior.

General Business

The Chairman detailed future meetings as follows:

- 6 November 1997 — "This is my story" — Rev E Wykes
- 5 February 1998 — "This is my story" — Rev E Long
- 7 May 1998 — "This is my story" — Dr W. Anderson
- 6 August 1998 — Nostalgia Night — Hymns of Yesteryear

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Mr P Hayward, presented his report showing the following balances:

General Amount	\$3,343.45
Publications Fund	2,460.00
Essay Fund	<u>48.96</u>
Total	\$5,852.41

Speaker

Rev David Jones presented his paper and a video on the Centenary of the Northside Church at the conclusion of which members asked questions and commented on their views of the Church's history.

The meeting was closed in prayer by the Chairman at 8.45 pm.

O C Nannelli
Secretary

The Northside Church

Report of Meeting on 7 August 1997

Dr David Jones, Pastor of Northside Baptist Church, presented an audio-visual history of the church, established as the North Sydney Baptist Church in 1896, and now known as Northside since the amalgamation of North Sydney and Northbridge Churches in 1981. The Church has published a booklet giving a brief history of the first century. This report will mention a few highlights.

From the 1880's, attempts were made to establish a Baptist work on Sydney's North Shore, culminating in the constitution of the North Sydney Baptist Church on 1 November 1896. The church met at the School of Arts and had 13 members.

In 1900 the first church building, later demolished was opened and services began there. In 1909 the present church building, often referred to as the Cathedral Church, was opened.

In 1918 the first missionary, Miss Effie Stead, left for East Bengal to serve with what is now ABMS. Many have gone from the church to serve as missionaries since that time.

In 1927 the Northbridge Baptist Church was formed and its foundation members came from the North Sydney Church. In 1980 the North Sydney and Northbridge Churches amalgamated to form the

Northside Church. The Preschool established at Northbridge in 1950 continues to meet there under the management of the Northside Church.

A major building project in 1978 saw a new Baptist Centre built and opened on the site of the original church.

The growing ethnic diversity of Australia was recognised by the formation of a Japanese Baptist Fellowship in 1989.

From a membership of 13 in 1896, the church reached its highest membership of 223 in 1970. In 1996 membership was 101.

Anybody interested in pursuing further the history of the Northside Church should make contact with its office and enquire about the availability of the centenary booklet.



A Church Struggled to Survive

The Work at Cootamundra

Contributed by H Watkin-Smith

All around our State, both in the metropolitan area and more especially in rural areas, small churches, often despite desperate circumstances, have continued to survive and serve the cause of Christ. Often the cause has been maintained by one or two leaders and a few loyal supporters. Often there is only local recognition of gallant efforts to build up the Church of Jesus Christ but these efforts have strengthened the whole denomination. Our Baptist history and denominational strength owes much to many whose dedication is known no further than their local Church.



In his paper "Riverina Baptists" delivered to our society in July 1994, Gordon Young listed the Baptist causes commenced over the years in the Riverina. Next he gave a succinct comment on the reason for the survival or failure of these ventures. Against Cootamundra he noted survival by "dogged determination". In two vital periods in the Church's story and despite a short closure the refusal of the leaders to abandon the work was responsible for its eventual continuance.

Phase 1 — Mr Sid Steptoe and Rev Arthur Charles Donaldson

Mr Steptoe, a young man, a member of Concord Church and involved in the Young Men's Missionary League, and on the administrative staff of the NSW Railways, was appointed to Cootamundra in 1936 just after his marriage in November 1935. He found other Baptists there and commenced services in his own home in 1936. The preacher at these services was Mr Christie Hayward, a teacher at the High School, son of the pastor of the Lidcombe Church. The Home Mission Superintendent in his report to the 1936 Assembly said, "Cootamundra Baptists to the number of 10 are anxious for a cause to be started and we have appointed Mr Steptoe of Concord Church as Secretary". It is interesting to note that in that same year the South West District Association was formed with Mr Steptoe as Secretary. In the following year the Home Mission reported that a Church had been formed on Sunday morning 25 July 1937, with Rev A C Donaldson sacrificially serving as pastor and Mr Steptoe as Secretary and Treasurer. Highlett, Waldock and Leeder in their history of NSW Baptists say: "Rev A C Donaldson was impressed with the possibilities of this important town and largely at his own charges took up his residence there and endeavoured to establish a Baptist cause". Mr Donaldson had lost an arm in the War and was largely dependent on his military pension. After he left Cootamundra, Highlett, Waldock and Leeder commented: "It was a courageous venture of faith and displayed considerable devotion and self-sacrifice."

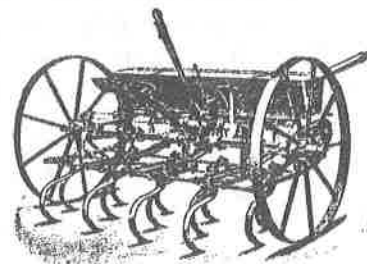
He continued to labour till 1941 and although his labours produced disappointing results we believe the seed for future developments were sown".

Mr and Mrs Donaldson gave themselves willingly to the task. Services were held in the CWA Rooms, a Sunday School was commenced with six children and two teachers, Mrs Donaldson being both Superintendent and Secretary. Shortly afterwards a Ladies Guild and a CE Society were formed. When Mr Steptoe was transferred to Sydney in 1938 Mr Hayward became Treasurer and Mr Donaldson acted as Secretary. As part of an extension effort towards the end of 1938 services were held fortnightly in the home of Mr F W Davey, near Gundagai, the services being conducted by Mr Donaldson or Mr Hayward.

One of the problems for the new Church was constantly changing membership. A large Church can accommodate it, but it is a drastic experience for a small one. Among the few early members were employees of Government Departments or agents for firms with national interests, and their stay in the town was often short affecting a continuity in leadership positions. Although membership grew through transfers in and visitation, deaths and transfers away kept the total to below 10. The Home Mission was concerned and early in 1940 advised Mr Donaldson that he would be transferred to Ariah Park. Mr Donaldson refused to give up his commitment to Cootamundra and it was agreed that he should continue for another six months. In March 1941 the Home Mission decided the grant to Cootamundra should cease in April, but Mr Donaldson had arranged a mission to be conducted by Rev R Leghorn. This mission, held in the local theatre, was not a success, attendances being meagre. The Home Mission ceased grants but Mr Donaldson carried on, reported encouragements in the work and asked the Union to send Rev Phil Hayes for a mission. Late in 1941 the Donaldsons reluctantly left Cootamundra. The membership had dropped to seven, although over the years the composition of the membership varied greatly.

Phase 2 — Survival during an interregnum

The Home Mission asked the Church at Wagga (formed in 1941) to supply preachers for Cootamundra, the Home Mission to be responsible for travelling expenses. Mr Steptoe had been appointed to Wagga by the Railways in 1941 and he gave some help and encouragement to Cootamundra. In July 1942 the money in the Bank (£134.18.10), all but one pound being designated for land, and one hundred pounds from one donor, was transferred to a Trust Account. How long this arrangement for preaching appointments persisted is not clear but the remnant of members carried on. From 1941-1944, Mr E J Passant (the local AMP was Secretary, Mrs Passant carried on the Ladies Guild, 1942-44, Mr K G Matheson was Treasurer in 1942 and Mrs Matheson was in charge of the Sunday School of four scholars 1942-45. In 1943 Mr Matheson, a member of Mr Donaldson's congregation, wrote asking for a man for Cootamundra, but there is no indication of how many supported the request. It would seem that the influence of Mr and Mrs Donaldson's efforts lingered and Baptists were not forgotten in Cootamundra, a fact which seems to have stirred the Home Mission in August 1948 to ask Temora Church to undertake a monthly service in Cootamundra. The first such service was held on 14 October 1948 with 34 persons attending. This was despite the fact that the Home Mission in 1944 declared that the Church had ceased to exist by the removal of all active members leaving only three non-attending members.



Phase 3 — A New Beginning and Mr Albert Vincent Crooks

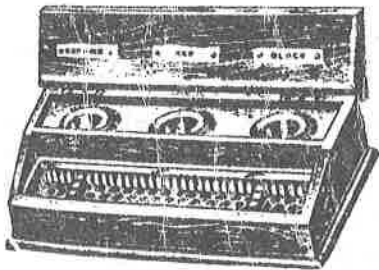
A revitalisation of the cause owed much to Mr A V Crooks with encouragement from his father-in-law, George Hillard. They were members of our Mimosa Church near Temora but in 1946 moved to Brawlin, 15 km from Cootamundra. A periodic service was conducted there by the Presbyterians and Mr Crooks arranged for Rev R Nowland of our Junee Church to hold a service on alternate months. In 1948 the Crooks family moved to Cootamundra. They discovered that there had been a Baptist Church there in the early 1940s with one family from it still in the district. Messrs Crooks and Hillard asked the Union to re-commence a Baptist work. The success of the service of 14 October 1948 (mentioned above) led to its continuance, Pastor Mogenson of Temora coming for some months and being succeeded in 1949 by Pastor A E Baker of Junee. In March 1950 16 persons requested the Union to form a Church. The Church was formed on 12 February 1951 by three officers of the Union — the President, Mr R Lawrenson; the Secretary, Rev A L Leeder; and the Home Mission Superintendent, Rev E F Heather. A home missionary, Mr A Wheat, came as pastor and Mr A V Crooks was elected Secretary. For 30 years the name of A V Crooks kept appearing as either Secretary or Treasurer whenever other members were unavailable to fill either of these positions. He was indefatigable in service and was well-supported by a small group of helpers as well as by members of his own family. He built from second-hand material a Sunday School hall in a poor part of the town, known as Shanty Town, in which he conducted classes for several years. He regularly preached in the open air and when the need arose preached in the Church. After his retirement he worked in a voluntary capacity in the market gardens of Bimbadeen, the Aboriginal Evangelical Bible College. On Australia Day 1991 he was honoured for 40 years of service to the Cootamundra community by being named as Cootamundra Shire Citizen of the Year.



The Church commenced with nine members received by transfer. There was a Sunday School with Mr Elphick as Superintendent and Mrs Wheat formed a Junior Christian Endeavour Society. An early and welcome addition to the membership lasting three years came in the persons of Mr and Mrs K D Grieve (well-known later as domestic staff at Morling College). Their son Alan (now Rev A Grieve) was a scholar in the Sunday School. Mr Grieve served as Treasurer for three years 1952–54, and as Sunday School Superintendent for two years. Another couple who stayed for three years 1954–56, were Mr and Mrs R J Akhurst, Mr Akhurst serving one year as Secretary and the other two as Treasurer as well as being Sunday School Superintendent for a time. Mrs Akhurst led the JCE. Mr David Magill, well-known for his work with Christian Community Schools, worshipped at Cootamundra while employed for a time at Gundagai. Mr Allan Godden, a public servant at Gundagai, challenged by the situation, arranged for his Department to transfer him to Cootamundra. He made an impact as Secretary and preacher before being transferred to Gunnedah. These members whose stay was only temporary brought encouragement and hope to those continuing on. The interest shown by a few local residents was another cause for hope. Nevertheless a small membership and poor accommodation made it difficult to attract local residents. A comment by Rev

A Brown (*Australian Baptist* 26/6/68) is an appropriate description:

"The grand little bunch of folk here at Cootamundra have won my thorough admiration for struggling on as they have for years and years in a little wooden building that was dismantled 40 miles away, carted over here and reconstructed by the merest handful of willing toilers. There is just one building, there are no facilities, the seats are old theatre seats, shabby in the extreme with a great deal of upholstery gone and there is nothing (except the cheerfulness of the people) to attract anybody who comes once to the Church to come again". The writer who preached there often in 1964-5 would confirm every word.



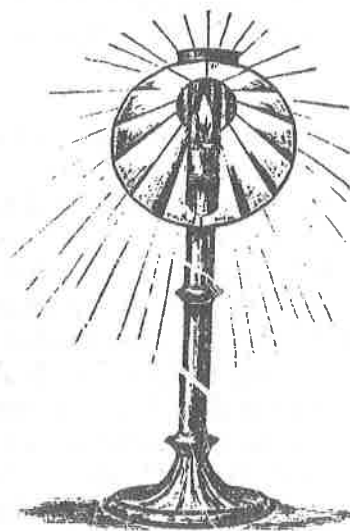
Meeting Places and Property

The revival of services in 1948-50 had as a meeting place the vestibule of the Town hall, but the new Church soon moved to the CWA Hall and in 1952 bought land in Sutton Street. The following year the Church tendered for and secured the empty Lutheran church building at Gidgenbung, near Temora. The task of moving the building from Gidgenbung fell almost entirely on the hands of A V Crooks. He spent the two weeks of his annual holidays dismantling the building and then a member of the Church transported the dismantled sections on his truck to Sutton Street. For several weeks Bert Crooks spent his Saturday afternoon re-erecting the sections with some help from some of the man. The

new Church was officially opened on Easter Monday 1954. At the time there were 15 members, five local preachers and two preaching stations.

In 1959 from the sale of the Barmedman manse a substantial donation was made toward the purchase of a manse at Cootamundra. In 1980, Bert Crooks (now retired) worked full-time in a voluntary capacity with occasional help from members in erecting a new hall behind the Sutton Street Church. An accident to Mr Crooks on the building delayed its opening until February 1982.

Calamity struck at 2 am on Thursday 26 May 1983 when Sutton Street Church was burnt down by an arsonist. Fortunately the new hall escaped (for details see *Australian Baptist* 8/8/94). With the proceeds from the insurance, the sale of the Sutton Street land, with the new hall still intact, and with donations from 108 churches, nine Ladies Fellowships and many personal donors, the Church was able to purchase the former Methodist complex which the Uniting Church was not using. The details of this fine property are described in *Australian Baptist* 19/9/84.



Pastors and Membership

The membership rose to 12 during Mr Wheat's pastorate which closed when at the end of 1953 he entered College and was succeeded by Pastor D F Collier, an exit student from College. Some advance was made with three baptisms in 1954 and another four baptisms in 1955, as a result of which the membership rose above 20 where it stayed for several years, reaching 27 in 1960 following four more baptisms in that year. The spirit of the people is demonstrated with the opening of two preaching stations in 1954 and five members being available as local preachers. At that time the Union's evangelist, Rev J W Fletcher was working for the South-West Association and D Collier, now ordained, undertook visitation in Young to foster Mr Fletcher's work there. In 1955 Mr Collier was appointed to Maitland and Mr Fletcher was appointed to Cootamundra to serve Cootamundra and Young until the Assembly. For the next two years pastoral oversight was supplied for some months by Pastor L. Jackson, supervisor of the Tumut Youth Camp, then by Rev J H Baker, an honoured retired minister and then again by Pastor Jackson because of Mr Baker's failing health. They were followed by Pastor T G Moore (2 years), Rev K L Meyer (2 years) and Rev R F Seagrave (1 year) and for three years by supplies from Wagga, Yass and local preachers.

The story of intermittent pastoral leadership came to an end with the 10 years of pastoral guidance by evangelist (later Rev) H A Brown 1966-75. There were still struggles, with a constant transfer of members into and away from the Church and the shortage of leaders available to serve for long terms. Rev H A Brown was succeeded by Rev F H Varnes (2 years), Rev D F Smith (3 years), Rev K Amery (8 years) and Rev D Hunt (8 years). The year after moving into the new Church membership increased and has varied between 40 and 50 members since, showing that a good property has made the task somewhat easier.

Young people growing up and trained in Cootamundra have gone out to serve in other Churches and in Christian organisations. The same is true of most of our small rural Churches and many struggling metropolitan Churches. Such Churches need our support in means, prayers and efforts.

Over recent years the Cootamundra Church has been fortunate to have a number of men and women to serve for lengthy periods in the leadership of the Church. The present Church is a tribute to the perseverance ("dogged determination") of a small group of people for half a century. Let us be grateful for choice souls who persevered at Cootamundra.

Sources of Information

Baptist Union Year Books and Handbooks — reports, statistics and directories
 Baptist Home Mission Minute Books
 Recollections: Mr S Steptoe; Miss L. Donaldson; Mr Alan Crooks of Gundagai;
 Situations noted by the writer
Australian Baptist — Reports
The Cootamundra Herald 30/1/91.

