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IN THIS ISSUE:

Minutes of the General Meeting 5 August 1999	Page 2
History of Mortdale Church	Page 3

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 4 November 1999
at 7.30 pm
in the
Morling Chapel, Eastwood

Speaker: Rev John Curtis

Topic: *Denominational Evangelism 1945-1983*

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Minutes of General Meeting 5 August 1999

The Chairman opened the meeting in prayer at 7.30 pm and extended a welcome to all those present. Details of those in attendance are recorded in the attendance book, with apologies being received and accepted from Dr K Manly, Mr P Young and Rev M Dennis.

Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting of 6 May 1999, as published in *The Recorder*, were confirmed.

Chairman's Remarks

Rev Rogers outlined details of future meetings of the Society.

Treasurer's Report

Mr P Hayward reported on the Society's financial position. Balances were:

General Fund	\$4099.47
Publications Fund	2882.86
Essay Competition Fund	48.96
TOTAL	\$7031.79

The report was adopted by the members.

Speaker

The Chairman introduced Rev John Bracht, Pastor of the Mortdale Baptist Church, who shared highlights of the Church's first one hundred years. At the conclusion of the well researched address, many of those present shared their experiences of working and worshipping at Mortdale.

Close

The Chairman then closed this section of the meeting in prayer at 8.30 pm.

Dedication of Archival Building

Dr Graeme Chatfield welcomed all those present for this important dedication of the new archival rooms in the Morling College Library.

A special welcome was extended to Rev G Ball, President of the Baptist Union of New South Wales, and to Dr Robert Linder and Dr P Orlevich among many others.

Word of greeting were expressed by Rev R Rogers, Dr R Clifford and Dr R Linder, all of whom stressed the importance of historical archives.

The official dedication of the Archival Building was performed by Rev G Ball

An inspection of the new facility then followed.

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The History of Mortdale Baptist Church

**A Paper read at the Baptist Historical Society by Rev John Bracht
on 5 August 1999**

Writing the history of a congregation can be like preparing a eulogy, except that the subject of the eulogy is not quite dead yet.



It is sadly true though, that some anniversaries only generate fond memories of bygone days without much to look forward to. They can be melancholy occasions, expressing gratitude for the past but without any real conviction of prospects for the future. Happily, this is not always the case and churches which have been here for a century can now look forward to entry into a second century.

I have just returned from a three months exchange with the minister of the Baptist Church in St Andrews, Fife, Scotland, and last year they celebrated their 150th Anniversary, which of course, draws no gasps of astonishment in a town which is over 1,000 years old. It is still a thriving church. At about the same time as St Andrews Baptist was getting started, Mortdale as a suburb of Sydney did not even exist.

Any account of the beginnings of Baptist work in Mortdale must record as its first significant step, the arrival of Mrs George Gaites in 1895 or 1896. She lived in Station Street near Boundary Road and encouraged folk to attend services in what was then called the 'hut'. She encouraged the Newtown Church to support the area and often met visiting preachers at Peshurst Station. Curiously, the Newtown records contain no reference to Mrs Gaites or Mortdale, though there were still people alive in the 1960's at Mortdale who remembered her with great fondness. In 1898, the Carlton Church took charge of the Mortdale Mission for one year.

Nearly four years later in 1902, Mortdale requested severance and thanked Carlton for their help and encouragement. That same year, the Secretary Mr Bell wrote to the Home Mission Committee asking for its support for a church building in Mortdale. In January 1903, four allotments of land were bought at the corner of Pitt Street, the Strand and George Street for £70, £50 being the loan from Home Mission Committee. The loan was repaid in six months, an admirable effort considering that eight years later the average weekly offerings were little more than ten shillings. The Home Mission Committee purchased and erected a portable, ready-cut building from Hudson Brothers. When the last payment was made in 1911, the treasurer, ecstatic with joy, burned the books of account and commenced a new one!

The new Church which would later be moved by wagon and horses to the present church site and then demolished in 1972, 60 years later, cost £120. It had neither vestry nor baptistry; ventilation was inadequate and it swayed when the wind blew, but to the worshipping congregation it was as grand as any cathedral.

On 20 June 1905 the Mortdale Mission became an affiliated Baptist Church and the Rev John Parker was invited to take charge of the oversight of the church. Between 1905 and 1914 the young church grew steadily. (How costs have changed. In 1910 it cost 1/- per week to clean the church, to which the Sunday School contributed sixpence.) At the end of 1911, Rev J Parker resigned the pastorate of Carlton and Mortdale agreed to join in a call to Rev W P Phillips who served until 1913.

The arrival of Pastor D F Mitchell as first student-pastor in June 1914 marked the commencement of a period of successful evangelistic effort and Church growth. During his brief pastorate of 20 months, membership rose from 31 to 58. Soon the old church became too small to house the congregation and Sunday School, so a building fund was started which would lead to the erection of a new church 14 years later.

A number of short-term pastorates followed, leading to the year 1922 and the commencement of the ministry of the Rev John Baillie whose ministry both in length and type, was an epoch in the life of the church. A fervent and eloquent preacher and a well-loved pastor, his 8-9 years saw solid growth. Membership increased by 50% and the church became self-supporting. The level of giving to missions rose substantially. In the 19th year after formation and the second year of Mr Baillie's pastorate a large allotment of land was purchased at the present site and plans for a new church drawn up. Because of insufficient money to build they decided to move the Church and Primary Hall to the new site together with fences and brick paths! Even though at that time, Mortdale could not afford a new building, the Pastor commenced Bible studies in a home in Hurstville leading to the commencement of the Hurstville work in conjunction with Carlton.

On 15 October 1927, a large crowd of past and present members, denominational leaders and other friends, gathered in the church grounds for the laying of the foundation stones by the President of the Baptist Union, Rev C J Tinsley and the Pastor, John Baillie. On Saturday 10 March 1928, the new church building was formally opened on the corner of Boundary Road and Woronora Parade. The total cost of the building was £3,285 of which £2,045 were already in hand.

The year 1930 marked the 25th Anniversary of the Church and sadly, the death at the age of 35 of its beloved pastor, Rev John Baillie. His death was a great loss to the Baptist denomination and to the flock he tended. It was during his time that Mortdale came of age, moved to its present site, built the new sanctuary and became self-supporting. His grandson, Mark Baillie is an active member of the congregation and recently served as Church Treasurer.

Mr Baillie was succeeded by the Rev E H Watson an outstanding evangelist and pastor whose time saw the membership grow from 83 members to 168 by 1936. Pastor Watson was also an outstanding musician and during his ministry the choir came into its own.

During the 30's Mortdale expressed dissatisfaction that no new works were being started. Penshurst was left to the vigorous new Hurstville Church but ultimately they fostered Riverwood, while Narwee later became the replacement for Penshurst. Como remained unresponsive. Sutherland-Cronulla was not yet an available area.

The Rev F H Starr, a preacher with a great expository gift continued to steer the church through the difficult years of WWII. It was he, who in conjunction with Rev A H Orr of Bexley, prospected the opening of Baptist work in the Sutherland-Cronulla area and became Moderator of the joint causes in that region. One of the young men from Mortdale, Mr Alf Barry was appointed honorary Pastor of the two churches. He was succeeded there by Frank Keogh. Pastor Starr later joined the RAAF in which service he gave his life for his country.

In 1940 the pioneering efforts at Lugarno were advanced by the erection of a church building with substantial aid, financial and otherwise from the Mother Church at Mortdale. In those hard, undramatic days of the war, Mortdale established a Boys Club in 1943 which became the 42nd Company of the Boys' Brigade. The Girls' Brigade commenced in 1946.

By 1947 the membership had fallen to 132, many having transferred to other places and some to form the original Lugarno membership.

In the same year and month I was born, May 1947, the Rev R F Pitt commenced a whirlwind ministry of 15 months before leaving for Canada. This was a time of experiment among young people — house-parties, fellowship teas, squash, religious films and the after-school club. The infectious enthusiasm of the pastor created a momentum that was carried on by Rev A C Le Claire minister from December 1948 to February 1954. Membership grew to 166 with an average attendance at Sunday School of 200. The church rejoiced in this eloquent preacher and evangelist and deeply understanding pastor. And Mrs Le Claire was regarded as a 'Mother in Israel' to many. In the last year of his ministry the youth hall was built providing further space for the Sunday School and CE work.

In 1955 the Rev J Colin Campbell commenced what was to be the longest pastorate in Mortdale's history and a period of abundant blessing. During his first year the membership passed the 200 mark and plans for the extension of the church building were underway. Work commenced in September 1957, almost 30 years to the day since the foundation stone of the present building was laid. It was now that Mortdale assumed the profile on the corner for which it is best recognised today. A spacious nursery with a viewing window, a Church Office, a vestibule and cloak room, gas heaters for winter comfort, the provision of silky oak pews to accommodate approximately 330 people, new windows, improved lighting and ventilation — all added greatly to the functions and capacity of the church. The enlarged church — really it was a new church, was opened for worship on 16 August 1958 by Miss Stella Saunders whose distinguished membership commenced in 1914, and who for over 60 years was Primary Dept and Junior CE Superintendent. The cost was approximately £14,000. Now 40 odd years later, we are going to rebuild on the present site again, only this time it will cost as 55 times that amount!!

The 1959 Billy Graham Crusade which had such a marked effect on Australia served to revitalise Mortdale and brought new converts into the fellowship. Mortdale Church buses and additional hired buses, transported more than 5,000 people to and from the Crusade. It was the dedicated follow-up and establishment of the all-age Sunday School which solidified those gains. Within two months in 1960 the attendance at Sunday School rose from 290 to 370. By 1965 the average had risen to 460.

History was made on 4 March 1962 when, having reached a membership of 400, the congregation joined together in a day of thanksgiving to God for his manifold mercies and blessings. Sixteen of the surviving 24 members of the 1905-16 period were present. By 1964, the 10th year of J C Campbell's ministry, Mortdale's membership of 442 made it the largest Baptist church in the denomination. That same year, along with all his pastoral duties, the Executive Committee of the Baptist Union of NSW had appointed the Pastor as Honorary Acting Principal of the Theological College until the Annual Assembly in September.

During J C Campbell's time Mortdale established the work at Peakhurst South as part of its Diamond Jubilee Effort. The congregation also furnished two rooms at Waddock in acknowledgement of the long-term services of the retiring Secretary and Treasurer, Frank and R E Walker. Mr Campbell was possessed of outstanding gifts of organisation and inspiration and his pastorate marked a high point in the history of the church. In 1968 he accepted a call to a smaller church, more in keeping with his state of health. He had served faithfully for 14.5 years.

Time won't permit me to speak of the many members of the congregation who served with distinction in various capacities, but I must mention Mr Ronald Earle Walker who came to the St George district in 1912 and was baptised in the church in 1915 by the Rev Donovan Mitchell. R E — 'Mr Mortdale' as he was affectionately called, served in the Sunday School

for over 40 years, 40 years as Treasurer, then served as an elder. He was a friend and counsellor to a great many people and a loyal supporter of every pastor. He served with distinction in the Baptist Denomination at large and was its President in 1940-41. He was also a distinguished Public Servant and was Prothonotary of the Supreme Court of NSW for nearly 17 years. It was my privilege to conduct his funeral on 24 July 1995 with Bruce King and Mike Dennis sharing in the service. His daughter Gwen Boston worships with us at Mortdale today.

Mr Campbell was succeeded by the Rev A G Rudd in 1969 after service at the Brisbane Baptist Tabernacle. He and his family took up residence at No 5 Woronora Parade, now a rented cottage next to the Church Office. In his 1970 Report, the Secretary Mr Alf Schulstad, now a member of Campbelltown Baptist referred to the church's decision to dispose of certain properties in order to finance improved educational facilities. In 1972 the church opened its Christian Education Centre and the Minooka Pre-School and purchased a manse in Woronora Parade in which the Rudd Family moved, releasing the existing manse for student pastor accommodation.

The 75th Anniversary was celebrated in 1973 with Principal Emeritus G H Morling as the Guest Preacher. Part-time student pastors were enlisted through the NSW Baptist Theological College. Two of these were Darrell McKerlie and Ken Clendinning. Then for the first time in his history, the church appointed an Associate Pastor, Rev David Kerr of the Port Kembla Church for a three years term in 1977. He assisted Pastor Rudd in preaching and visitation. A playgroup was established; the 60 years service of Misses Stella and Inez Saunders in the Bible School —Stella was Superintendent for 50 years — was recognised; Jack and Ida McKerlie moved to Evans Head as Managers of the Koinonia Baptist Camp where they served for five years; and preparations for the 1979 Billy Graham Crusade were made. Church buses, now four in number again helped bus people back and forward to the Randwick Racecourse. The Church also sponsored a visit to India of Rev Rudd to attend the 1st Asian Baptist Congress.

In 1980, eleven and a half years after his arrival, Pastor Rudd accepted a call to the Mornington Church in Victoria. Both he and his wife Joyce made a lasting impact on the people at Mortdale. I last saw them both, when following his serious illness, they returned to Oatley-Mortdale for the wedding of their son Peter which I performed in Oatley Park on 10 October 1998. Following his departure the church appointed its Associate, David Kerr, as Senior Pastor. His emphasis on personal evangelism was a major thrust of his ministry. During his ministry plans were finalised to amalgamate the work of Mortdale and Peakhurst South, and establish a team ministry with the Peakhurst South Pastor, Rev Don Eagle. Peakhurst had lasted for 15 years until it was realised that the resources of that church would be better utilised in an amalgamation with Mortdale.

After six and a half years his desire to pursue further studies and experience a break from 12 years continuous pastoral ministry, led him to conclude at Mortdale in 1983 and accept appointment as Coordinator of the People to People Counselling Service at Radio station 2CH.

Following the departure of David Kerr, the church was able to secure the service of one of its own members, Miss Anna Ingerman as a pastoral assistant. She had just concluded her teaching ministry at SMBC. A new pastoral team was in the making and it fell into place with the coming of the Rev Gerry Ball in 1984. Gerry had been Principal of the South Australian Baptist Theological College and after 16 years was open to return to pastoral ministry. He was to be joined by the Rev Grant Cole from the Yass Church who served as Associate Pastor.

New leadership structures came into being with elders having prime responsibility in

assisting the pastoral team in the spiritual leadership of the church and deacons forming a Church Council with each member having a defined portfolio. It came as a tremendous shock to Pastor Ball and the church when his wife Betty died suddenly in June 1987. Betty had exercised an effective pastoral ministry in her own right alongside her husband's solid preaching ministry and was the inspiration behind the new Community Services ministry which became 'Creative Learning'. As a team, ministering together, they had been most effective and blessed by the Lord. In the time that followed, Gerry himself underwent serious heart surgery but recovered and then in 1990 he married Denise Watson and together they exercised a caring ministry to the congregation. Both Gerry and Grant and their families were farewelled in 1991, Gerry going to the Gordon Church and Grant to Wentworthville Baptist. Seven years later in 1998, Gerry Ball became President of the Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT and he and are currently members again at Mortdale.

From its earliest days Mortdale has maintained a lively interest in and support for overseas missions. Miss Evans, Mr Len Akehurst, Mr and Mrs C B Cherbury and Miss Muriel Hatfield served with AIM. Miss Irene Hummell with the Kalimpong Homes in India; Rev Phil and Annette Gillman (nee White) in East Pakistan; Rev John and Marilyn James (nee Walker) in the Philippines; Rev Geoff and Meg Waugh (nee Bowman) in PNG; Dr John Peterson, Nigeria; Rev In and Dorothy North, Rev Doug and Daphne Gibb and Rev Allan and Pam Gardiner (nee Edgar) in the USA; John and Kat Harrowell PNG; Ian and Carole Barnett PNG; Ern and May MacReady PNG; Geoff and Narelle Stanbury (nee Dixon), in Zaire; Miss Anna Ingerman PNG and the Philippines; Mr Neill McLeod in PNG; Rev Graham and Wendy Bones (nee Griffith) in Bangladesh and Rev Allan and Sharyn Speakman in Indonesia.

Others with Mortdale associations have entered the ministry. They are: Lindsay Croll, Rowland Croucher, Michael Dennis, Robert Edgar, Victor Eldridge, Frederick Evans, Terry Hampson, Robert Ireland, Len Kingston, Don MacDonald, Rodney Macready, Darrell McKerlie, Cliff O'Grady, Allan Patino, Phillip Plowman, Bill Pratt, John Rees, Stephen Stubbings and Roger Waugh.

1988-1998

Following Gerry Ball's departure 1992 saw the congregation 'pastorless' but not without heart. The Rev Norman Kerslake filled in capably with a ministry of preaching and visitation together with his wife Dorothy in music. John Boston, Chairman of Elders, organised pulpit supply and Guy Yeomans assumed responsibility for property and chaired Church Council meetings. During the interim a new manse was purchased at 26 Park Avenue, Oatley West, partly from proceeds of the sale of the manse at Carramar Place in Peakhurst South. Then on 31 January 1993, the Rev John Bracht was inducted as Senior Pastor, by his friend of many years, the Rev Ross Clifford. Norman Kerslake continued his ministry as part-time Associate, concluding his ministry, but not his association with us, in 1994.

In 1995 we formulated a Mission Statement to take us to the end of the century. It included the themes 'Encouraging one another', 'Growing to Maturity', 'Building Bridges and Making Christ Known'. Our mottos, displayed on banners in the church are: 'Everyone a Witness', 'Everyone a Helper'. In 1994 Lloyd Miller, a student at Morling came to Mortdale as Student Pastor. One year later in February 1995 he was inducted as the new Associate Pastor. In his time he emphasised evangelism, small groups and the pastoral care of our youth. He was ordained in 1995. That same year he married and in December 1996 he and Simone accepted a call to the pastoral team of the Maroochydore Baptist Church. For the next year, I continued on my own until the induction of Pastor Cheryl Clendinning as Associate Pastor in February 1998.

The last decade has witnessed all the changes in society which continue to challenge the lie and functions of the church. The changing nature of youth and outreach work; the

movement of a number of our young marrieds to other regions such as Menai, Campbelltown and Wattle Grove and their contribution to outreach in the newer suburbs; the ageing of the congregation; the moving away in the last four years of a number of elderly couples; the rising costs of housing in Oatley and Mortdale and the constant demands of maintenance on old and inadequate buildings — all of these challenge us and exercise our minds today.

Mortdale's membership figures reflect in part the trends in evangelical Christianity in Australia. Overall Church attendance in Australia fell from 41% in 1960 to around 24% in 1985. The late 60's marked Mortdale's high point with a membership in excess of 400 (1968). Twenty years later in 1988 it had decreased to 297, and now ten years later still, it is about 100 less again, ie. 185.

Still, despite observing worrying trends we are in good spirits and heading full-steam towards the new millennium. Our community ministries are thriving — JAM, Creative Learning, the pre-school, Girls' Brigade and Boys Club (BOMB Squad). Two professional young people (Frazers) have used the JAM Centre as a Youth Outreach for vulnerable and marginalised young people. Our Sunday School is small, but we are presently experiencing a reversal in trends with more young couples remaining in the area. Of the 31 couples I have married over the last seven years, 15 have remained in the area and the congregation and several of them are about to have their first child. We are on the verge of a baby boom.

Over the past several years we have been busy with anniversaries — the 25th of Minooka (1998), the 50th of the Boys' Brigade (1994), the 50th of the Girls' Brigade (1998) and in March we had a Centenary Inauguration Service with period costume and a march through the streets culminating on Sunday 23 August 1998, with the actual Centenary of the Church. Among those in attendance were three past ministers, J Colin Campbell, David Kerr and Gerry Ball.

Where are we now? The redevelopment, sale of properties, relocation to Trinity Oatley Campus, time of challenge and growth.

