

# Exploring Baptist Brisbane

## A tour of important sites in Baptist witness around Brisbane

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*Most of the important places associated with early Baptist life are located close to the Central Business District of Brisbane. So it is easy to visit them, and to remember that they serve as reminders of God's grace and the zeal of our founders. Here is a suggested tour of these sites.*

*The first part focuses on the city centre and requires only a short time to complete. It would best be done on foot. It takes you through some of the most historic sites of 'Brisbane Town' as it was at first (from the 1840s), and also some of the most recent iconic commercial and civic developments of our bustling city.*

*The second and third parts go further out into the suburbs, but would require a car and a GPS or on-line mapping service.*



*Diagram map showing route of Part 1 of the Tour (created by E Kopittke)*

## Part 1 Inner City



A convenient place to start is Alice Street, with the City Botanic Gardens on your left. At the corner of George and Alice Streets, diagonally opposite the Gardens, the first Baptist minister in Brisbane Rev. Charles **Stewart** owned land which later became the site of the famous Bellevue Hotel (demolished in controversial circumstances in 1979 – currently a construction site). On the other corner is Parliament House, dating from 1865, replacing a former meeting place in Queen Street.

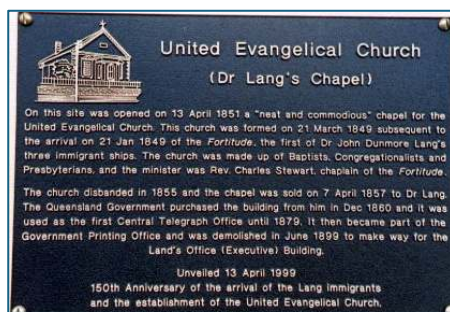
Leaving Alice Street, turn right into George Street and proceed along on the left-hand side almost to Charlotte Street. Stop at the entrance to Stephens Lane, named after **Thomas B Stephens**, a prominent early Baptist who operated a leather business here on the site of the Treasury Hotel (the former Land Administration Building, 1905).



Opposite Stephens Lane in George Street, the first Baptist in Queensland, **James Swan** owned several blocks which he used for commercial purposes, including his newspaper, the *Moreton Bay Courier*.

Walk through Stephens Lane, alongside the hotel, until you come to William Street. Opposite is the Commissariat Store dating from 1829 (now the museum of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland). It is the second oldest building in Queensland and one of only two from the days of the Penal Settlement.

On the corner of the Treasury Hotel near Stephens Lane, see the plaque marking the location of the **United Evangelical Church (UEC)**, which was erected in April 1851 (the plaque was unveiled exactly 150 years later!) as the place of worship for Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational immigrants who settled in Moreton Bay colony under a scheme organised by Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang, with Charles Stewart as minister. They arrived in 1849 on the ships *Fortitude*, *Chaseley* and *Lima* and formed the church



immediately under the leadership of the pastor, Rev. Charles Stewart. He served until the end of 1854. The building was sold in 1857 (the proceeds went to each of the denominations) and was later used as the Electric Telegraph Office. It was demolished in 1899 to make way for the Land Administration Building, also used as the Executive Building and now a Hotel.

Return on Stephens Lane to George Street and turning

left, go ahead until you reach the Queen Street mall, Brisbane's main central business area, which was originally the location of some important government and commercial buildings. On the left at 52 Queen Street, about three shops along as you walk towards Albert Street, stood the grocery store of **S & G Grimes**, who were leading Baptists.





About one third of the distance along, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Dymocks, stood the old Convict Barracks, which later were used for the Court House, the first Parliament House, and later the first Town Hall. Here in the **Exchange Room**, the UEC services and also the first Baptist services were held until dedicated buildings were erected. The Baptist church was constituted on 5 August 1855, led by Rev. Charles Smith, formerly of Parramatta, NSW.

Moving through the Mall on the nearest left-hand corner of Queen and Albert Streets was the site of a successful drapery store once owned by **Grimes and Petty**, both of whom were Baptists.

Continuing through the Mall on the left at Burberry/Ferragamo, the large drapery store of **RA Kingsford** was located. He was an important founding Baptist, and prominent civic and business identity. His brother, John, served as the founding pastor of Jireh Baptist Church in Gipps Street, Fortitude Valley for 37 years (see Part 2). Look up and see, under the name, Finney Isles, the five arches which perpetuated this feature on the original Kingsford Building (erected 1859).



Proceed further along Queen Street all the way to Wharf Street where you turn left and proceed up to the corner of Wharf and Adelaide Street. Notice the Student One building where the first Baptist chapel in Brisbane, known as Wharf Street Baptist Church, used to stand (plaque marks this site).

The **Wharf Street Baptist Church** was erected in 1859 by the builder, John Petrie, for £2050. The block of ground, which seemed almost too far from the town in those days, was sold to the church for £100 by T.B. Stephens, a foundation member and later also the owner of the *Moreton Bay Courier* and a successful politician. Rev.

Benjamin G. Wilson, who had commenced his vigorous ministry in 1858, served until ill health caused his retirement and death in 1878. He established many outstations and encouraged the formation of churches in other areas like Ipswich, Maryborough and Rockhampton. The chapel was extended and used until 1890, when it was sold for £165 and the site for £16,000.



Go one more block up Wharf Street and turn left into Ann Street (the street of churches – 7 of them!) and just around the corner, notice **No 345**, opposite All Saints' Church - the site of the first permanent Baptist Union headquarters, 1960 to 1972.



Continue along Ann Street past the front of the Central Railway Station. A church which broke away from Wharf Street was located in **Edward Street** from 1866-68 (although the building itself remained there much longer). It was situated up the hill opposite the station entrance towards Turbot Street, about halfway along the building called '192Central'.







Continue on Ann St down to King George Square, and look to the right along Roma Street, with the Turbot Street overpass visible. This low-lying area was the location of a stream coming down from the old Reservoir (at the other end of the street near the current railway station) which was the **site of the first baptisms**. They were conducted on 31 May 1857 by Rev. James Voller, of

Bathurst Street church in Sydney, who was visiting Brisbane to assist the church after its first minister had left. The candidates were two young men, James and George Grimes, members of a prominent Baptist family. Another service was conducted here on 14 Nov 1958.

Then proceed up Albert Street with the Uniting Church on your right, and turn right at the corner into Turbot Street. Go along Turbot Street to Edward Street and turn left up the hill, crossing Wickham Terrace. Notice the **City Tabernacle Baptist Church** ahead of you, listed with the National Trust. This imposing building, designed by the important Baptist architect and member of the church, Richard Gailey, was opened in 1891 at a total cost of £20,799, to replace the old Wharf Street building. The pastor was Rev. William Whale (1885-1903), a graduate of Spurgeon's Pastors' College, London, and the most outstanding churchman in Brisbane at the time.



This church was a landmark for Brisbane until high-rise buildings began to obscure it. Since its erection, it has served the needs of a large city congregation. But for most of that time, it was also the hub of Baptist denominational life as well. For many years, it was the site of the annual Assemblies and many other Baptist Union functions. Its striking tower was the birthplace of the Queensland Baptist (Theological) College and its home for a lengthy period. The Ministers' Fraternal also used it for its meetings. A 'time capsule' hidden in the base at the time of erection contains interesting documentation of life in the 1890s (but its exact whereabouts in the structure are

unknown!). A plaque on the right of the front doors also records the close connection between the church and the Christian Endeavour movement.

Near the side door (in Upper Edward Street), see a commemoration of a school conducted on the premises which became Sommerville House (now in South Brisbane), and at the back of building on Upper Edward Street, note Willara House which was the original manse.

*This completes Part 1 of the tour. So visit a coffee shop in Wickham Terrace up from the City Tabernacle, and perhaps you may see Brisbane's oldest building further up the street, the old Windmill Tower, dating from 1828 in the convict period.*

**End Part I**

## Part 2

### City Edge and Western Suburbs and South Brisbane

To start Part 2 of the tour, go to the City Tabernacle Baptist Church on the corner of Wickham Terrace and Upper Edward Street.

Proceed along Upper Edward Street and turn left into Leichhardt Street, and then see **Fortescue Street**, on the right. Near the right hand corner stood the Fortescue Street church (a continuation of the Edward Street church) from 1876 (another Richard Gailey building). The fellowship disbanded in 1889 (with the impending opening of the City Tabernacle) and the building was moved to Chapel Street, Nundah where it was used by the Baptist Church there for over 30 years; since then it has been used by various groups, (including a church for some time). Follow Fortescue Street across Boundary Street up to Gregory Terrace. The minister of Wharf Street church, **Rev. Benjamin G. Wilson**, lived in this fashionable area to the right beyond the junction.

Follow Gregory Terrace to the left right through to College Road, go through the five-way intersection, and turn left into Hale Street, observing the old **Petrie Terrace Church** on the left (corner of Judge Street), opposite Lang Park, now in private hands and converted into an attractive residential building. The fellowship was established in 1870 as an outreach from the Edward Street church, consolidating Sunday School and Band of Hope work commenced earlier. The ground was given by pioneer Baptist and first pastor, Rev. William Moore. The first building was erected in 1869 and this one in 1895. **Lang Park** opposite, now home to a large sports arena, was named after the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian minister, Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang, whose work assisted Baptists in Queensland, as well as many other groups. It was the site of the **Brisbane Burial grounds**, the Paddington Cemeteries, from 1844 to 1865. The Baptist section was located near Moreton and Charlotte Streets, north of Caxton Street.

Now go to Milton Road and follow it through to Croydon Street, Toowong. At the intersection of Jephson Street and Sylvan Road, notice **Toowong Baptist Church**, the home of a large Chinese congregation. The main part of this building was erected in 1881 (and enlarged in 1884 and vestries added) by the long-time founder-pastor, William Richer, making it the oldest existing church building still in use by a Baptist church in Queensland. Richer was responsible for many other buildings, including Albion and Petrie Terrace Baptist Churches.

Go further along Croydon Street to Milton Road and turning to the left, follow it out to the **Toowong Cemetery** (established in 1875 to replace the old Paddington Cemeteries). Here such people as Revs. B.G. Wilson, J. Kingsford (Jireh), W. Whale, James Voller and first missionary, Miss Martha Plested, were buried.

Follow the Western Freeway and turn left onto Moggill Road. Rev. William Moore lived on the present site of the **Indooroopilly State School** (corner Taringa Parade) in his retirement, giving time to the establishment of the school. He is buried in the **Chapel Hill Uniting cemetery** a little further out Moggill Road (corner of Chapel Hill Road). The district of Moore Park – and the Baptist church adjacent of the same name – was probably named after his son.

Return to Moggill Road and drive out through Kenmore to Gold Creek Road at Brookfield, and see the **Baptist aged care centre**, opened 1972, and beyond that - the **Queensland Camps and Convention Centre** (QCCC) site which occupies the former site of the Queensland Baptist College of Ministries, which was relocated there from Gray Road, West End in 1974. The college moved to the QB Centre at 53

Prospect Road, Gaythorne in 2005 and was renamed Malyon Theological College. It was taken over in 2025 by Morling College, Sydney and became its Brisbane campus. The Brookfield facilities are on land originally selected by Dr J.L. Dart in recognition of the contribution made by the Dart family to the Brookfield area and Baptist witness in Queensland. Several family members are buried in the local cemetery.

Return back to the city via Moggill Road and Coronation Drive, cross the William Jolly Bridge, drive along Grey Street, South Brisbane. As you cross the bridge, look forward to the left towards the **Library and Museum**. Rev. Charles Stewart resided in this area for some time. Further down Grey Street just beyond Melbourne Street on the right lies the stately **South Brisbane Railway Station**. The main building stands on the site of a Presbyterian Church where Rev. John Kingsford, founding pastor of the Jireh Particular Baptist Church, had earlier exercised a valuable preaching ministry.

Continue along Grey Street and turn right into Glenelg Street and then right again into Cordelia Street, and follow it through, turning left into Montague Road. Follow this street all the way to Gray Road, Hill End. Observe at Number 55 (now a hostel) the first residential home of the **Baptist Theological College** in a building given by Mr and Mrs E. Humphreys in 1939. Additional buildings were later erected, and the site used until 1973 when the move was made to Brookfield.

Return along Montague Road and turn right into Vulture Street, and travel through West End to the junction with Stephens Road, noticing the imposing **Sommerville House** ahead on the right. The boarding section of this school was the family home of T.B. Stephens, benefactor of the Wharf Street church. The school had its origins at the City Tabernacle Baptist Church, Upper Edward Street. Stephens was also active in local government representing South Brisbane and was mayor of Brisbane.

Continue along Vulture Street, and at the city side of Christie Street, note the former **site of South Brisbane Baptist (Vulture Street) Church** (now the Courtyard Marriott Hotel). This church was founded in 1872 on land bought by T.B. Stephens, and became an influential force on the south side of the city. It was not one of the original members of the Baptist Union formed in 1877, but joined very soon after. Two of its pastors, Rev. William Bell (1921-40) and Rev. Thos. C. Warriner (1941-66), served as principals of the College. In 2013 it relocated to 859 Stanley Street opposite the sporting arena as Church@TheGabba.

Continue along Vulture Street, turning left at Main Street, cross the Story Bridge and come to Gipps Street, Fortitude Valley. The former **Jireh Baptist Church** stood on the right between Ann and Wickham Street. It was formed as a Particular Baptist Church with members leaving from Wharf Street in 1861. It in turn fostered numerous churches, including Windsor Road (1876), Albion (1882) and Nundah (1886) – which in turn formed several other daughter churches. The building was erected in 1862, being designed by the eminent local architect, Benjamin Backhouse. It was classified by the National Trust in 1970. The fellowship ceased operation in 1978, and its name was transferred to the Centenary Jireh Baptist Church at Middle Park. The old building was destroyed by fire in 1987, although it was not in use as a church at the time.

*Unless you decide to take the supplement mentioned next, this brief tour can end by travelling back to the Queen Street Mall, near where United Evangelical and then Baptist services were first held, and near the Grimes' businesses and the Kingsford Drapery. As you sip your coffee, give God thanks for the early founders of Baptist work in Brisbane.*

**End Part 2**

## Part 3

### Northern Suburbs

For an interesting extension to this tour, find your way to Wickham Street (near the intersection with Boundary Street) in the northern part of the CBD, and proceed along Wickham Street towards **Fortitude Valley**. In the low-lying area to the left (where the train line now sits), the early Lang settlers were forced to set up their camp in 1849 when the government refused to provide them with the anticipated assistance. (They gave it the name of their first ship).

Continue on Wickham Street and find your way to Abbotsford Road, and then via Albion, to Sandgate Road. Continue until you come to the junction with the East-West Arterial near Nundah. Keep going on Sandgate Road, but before the underpass, take the fork through 'Nundah Village' and in the shopping area, turn left at **Chapel Street** (one way). Stop by the park and on the right observe the old **Fortescue Street** church, and next to it the 'new' North-East Baptist Church, opened in 2003 to replace the Nundah War Memorial Church (erected 1923).

Follow around the front of the church turning right into Bage Street, and then turn right again down Boyd Street, then turn left back into Sandgate Road. Turn left at the roundabout at the end of the shops into a parking area and observe in the park a dignified granite **First Free Settlers Monument**, honouring the first free settlers from Zion's Hill area, listing their names, some of which are commemorated in local street names like Rode Road, Gerler Road and Franz Road.

To see the area where the Gossner Missionaries settled, turn right down Buckland Road and make your way to the right along **Hedley Avenue**. This is the 'Zion's Hill' area where the missionaries from Germany settled in 1838 (even before the Moreton Bay Penal Colony was opened to free settlement) to begin their work among the local Indigenous people. Their Christian connections are reflected in locations such as 'Zion's Hill' and near-by 'Kedron Brook', named by them in honour of biblical sites. When the missionary work failed, these pioneers turned to other pursuits, and associated themselves actively with various churches, including the Baptists. Several are buried in the Nundah Historical Cemetery on Hedley Avenue.

Return to Sandgate Road and heading out of town, follow Sandgate Road through to Virginia and turn left into Zillmere Road, noticing the watercourse in this area, **Zillman's Waterholes**. Here is where many German families settled and formed a church on the site of the current Church of Christ, further along Zillmere Road. Many of them then moved to the fertile areas out beyond Ipswich to take up farming in the districts of Rosewood, Mt Walker and Fassifern. They established thriving churches, some of which are still in existence.

Go back to Sandgate Road, and on the return journey, detour to the left from Sandgate Road at Railway Parade to 110 Alexandra Road and the **Clayfield Baptist Church**, originally known as Hendra Baptist Church. The chapel which had been used at Zion's Hill since 1855 was re-erected at the back of this property in about 1874 and remained in use until 1966, when the present church was erected as a Christian Education block. Another attractive church building had been used as the church from 1890 to 1986. The site itself had been donated by one of the Gossner missionaries, F T Franz, for this purpose. Further along at **61-63 Alexandra Road**, the property was used as 'Clifford House', the Baptist Aged Persons' Home. This work commenced at the stately **Farrington House in 39 David Street**, Alderley in 1949 which was used until its sale in 1956 and the move to more suitable premises at Ascot. New premises in 44 Jimbour St, Woolloowin were opened in 1991.

Return to Sandgate Road and take the Albion Railway overpass; turn into McLennan Street and see the **Albion Baptist Church** at No 14. This church was established as an outreach of Jireh in the early 1880s; the building was erected in 1883, and in 1890, Rev. William Higlett began a long and effective ministry as pastor. He was a highly prominent and capable minister who served in both Queensland and later NSW. Across the Brisbane River, Jireh church was also involved with the **Bulimba Baptist Church**, which was on land given by the Johnson family, who had been Lang immigrants on the *Lima*.

*As you travel back to the city, pause to thank God for 'the great cloud of witnesses' who have laboured before us, and dedicate yourself again to follow 'Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' in our own day (Hebrews 12:1, 2).*

**End Part 3**

## Additional Sites of Interest

**In the early days, there were also Baptist church sites in the following localities at different times (some only short-lived):**

Annerley (Fairfield), Bulimba, Dunellan (Greenslopes), Enoggera, Graceville, Pinkenba, Sandgate

**There were also early churches in country and regional areas:**

Beaudesert, Charters Towers, Gympie, Ipswich, Lakes Creek, Maryborough, Mt Morgan, Rockhampton, Lanefield/Rosewood, Toowoomba, Townsville

**There were also churches of the German Baptist Conference in**

Blenheim/Laidley, Boonah, Kalbar (Engelsburg), Marburg, Minden, Mt Walker (Coleyville), Tarampa, Tent Hill, Vernor

*There are some buildings and sites of interest in these locations.*

**Contact the Baptist Church Archives Qld or Baptist Historical Society of Qld for more information**

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