



The Queensland Baptist Forum

The Journal of Baptist Heritage Queensland

No. 107 December 2020

Heritage Plaque Number 6—North East Baptist Church



Rev Peter Cossgrove and Mr Eric Kopittke

On Monday 26 October, Baptist Heritage Qld opened another plaque in its Heritage Plaque program. This was the sixth in the series and was placed at North East Baptist Church.

The plaque commemorates three Baptist buildings in Chapel Street Nundah, a first for the project. The first building (still standing next door) was the former Fortescue Street (Spring Hill) church which was moved there in 1889 and became the first home of the then year old Nundah Baptist Church.

In 1923, a new wooden church was built adjacent as the Nundah Baptist Memorial Church, honouring Baptist people who fell during World War I, with special features recognizing local men consisting of windows and plaques. The old church was soon sold and became a Masonic Lodge, then an Anglican church and eventually business premises.

The Memorial church was used, being added to, renovated and modified over the years, until 1999 when it was demolished as part of the Nundah road tunnel project. The current building was opened in 2003 (as North East Baptist), more or less on the site of the memorial church.

BHQ usually opens its plaques as part of a regular church service but as that was not possible this time, a group of church officials and BHQ members met for the function on a weekday afternoon. (Interestingly, the opening of the Memorial church was delayed because of the Influenza epidemic!)

The plaque is located on a brick wall on the Chapel Street side of the church complex where it can be seen easily by the many people who use the footpath every day. BHQ has plans for further plaques but progress on this project involves overcoming some obstacles.

BHQ Meetings 2021: Feb 27; June 19, Nov 6 (AGM) 2pm at The Baptist Archives

Zoom access available by arrangement

Baptist Heritage Queensland

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Midbar – The Dream that Died

By David Parker

with extensive input from Rev Dr Geoff Cramb and Miss Dawn Courtman



The Manse arrives at Boscombe Road

Introduction

One day in August 1995, a small group of members of the Windsor Road Baptist Church gathered in the pitch blackness of early morning at the church's former manse in 14 Blythe Street in the inner Brisbane suburb of Kelvin Grove.

They watched as their beloved building was loaded onto a lorry and began to make its way slowly to the leafy surrounds of Brookfield. It was bound for 220 Boscombe Road, a hilly site in the bush where there were plans for it to be renovated and become a Baptist retreat centre, called by the biblical name, Midbar.

This was a tangible symbol of hope for the group of people who, with considerable energy and determination, had dedicated much effort and time to the development of this concept. A lot more work would be needed before the project was completed, but their endeavours would in the end be thwarted and come to little.

The house was the gift of Windsor Road Baptist church. The block of practically virgin land, 4.2 ha in area, was part of the property of the Baptist Theological College that had been allocated for the centre.

The people involved formed the Baptist Retreat Ministry, several of whom came from the Windsor Road church. They were devoted to the idea of a centre where small groups of people could come for a short period of time to find "intimacy with God" (as one informational brochure put it).

Bigger story

But this is part of much bigger and longer story stretching across the country and back in history. In Queensland, it had begun about a decade earlier when groups of pastors seeking to develop their spiritual lives and ministry started to hold retreats.

Of course, Baptist pastors had been holding retreats or conferences for many decades—probably the first of which there is any record was one held in mid-1900, an interdenominational gathering at Redcliffe (which had to be reached by steamer!). It featured a theology professor from Melbourne giving talks on the Hebrew prophets. It was said there was an "atmosphere of religious devotion and fervour" with prayer meetings and other gatherings for "social, fraternal and spiritual fellowship". The communion service featured a "powerful, uplifting sermon" by Rev William Whale (City Tabernacle) and "a tender address, which appealed to all hearts in gentle persuasiveness" by Rev Hugh Jones (City Congregational).

When the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal was formed a few years later, they would hold many conferences at a guest house or other suitable venue. The program usually involved a guest speaker who would bring lectures on some theological or pastoral matter, and there would be another speaker delivering Bible studies. But there was always plenty of discussion, formal and informal, about pastoral, church and family matters as well. Recreation was always, of course, a favourite feature—golf, footy and who knows what else!

Sometimes these 'retreats' were for just the men (yes, pastors in those days were all male!) but occasionally their wives and families joined them. At various times there were also conferences for the Ministers' Wives and (single, female) Missionaries. In later years they combined to form the Ministers' and Spouses' Conferences. In the early days, while the college principal, Rev TJ Malyon, was still in leadership, the conferences were heavily weighted with theological instruction and formed a kind of refresher course for pastors. Many years later they would in fact be known as "The School of Theology."

NSW origins

However, a new development for pastors' retreats began to appear in the 1970s, first of all in NSW. There some pastors met as part of an initiative by the director



Some of the volunteers

of Baptist Union Department of Evangelism, Rev John Curtis. The first gathering was in 1976 when 11 pastors met with the idea that they would learn the process and share it with their churches and with other pastors. Following this, Les Scarborough and Doug Sotheren were invited to conduct more Pastors' Renewal Retreats, four of which were held over an 18 month period. Reactions and involvement varied widely, with some benefitting greatly and others not. But the load on the leaders was so heavy that they soon had to stop.

Still believing that there was value in the idea, a think-tank was held where the whole process was reviewed. A paper by Doug Sotheren, "The role of retreats in the process of renewal", emerged. The idea was that,

If God is to do a new thing in this age, we need to create an environment in which His people can hear Him. ... In the retreat atmosphere we come out of the world of our old ways and structures and battle without structure in an experience of truly meeting with ourselves, with one another, and with the Lord.

Discussion continued in early 1980 while they tried to develop a clearer idea of the process to be followed. They ceased to be an official group of the Baptist Union but several of the leaders continued to meet regularly in

the hope that they would see "God's direction in the Renewal movement in NSW and wider in Australia"

It was at this time that an invitation was given by Baptist Union of Queensland to John Cox and Les Scarborough to conduct pastor's renewal retreats in Queensland. There were more developments to come in NSW which would soon influence the Queensland effort. The same kind of development was also occurring in WA.

An important stage was reached in early 1984 when, it was reported, "God broke through and clearly revealed his way ahead through brother Ron McLean - Yes, we were of one mind. This was of God - Eureka! it was time to recommence retreats." The insights of Ron McLean led to the reconfiguring of the retreat idea. Under the new arrangement, each retreat group would meet for at least two years and then divide into two more groups. There would be five people in each group including at least two facilitators. These five participants would reach out to five others and so the process would be ready for another cycle. This was soon modified to a three-year cycle, with one retreat each year.

The focus was on personal, pastoral and leadership (church structure) issues, and as time went on, theological reflection and planning for the next cycle. A broad trans-denominational "Kingdom view" of renewal was fostered which included taking account of different dimensions—personal, corporate, conceptual, structural and missiological. As a result of feedback from NSW, Queensland and WA, there was in subsequent years a refocus from a "pastoral priority" to a more personal one, concentrating on a vibrant and growing life of faith. In 1988 a leadership facilitators' group was also developed to give some overall guidance to the movement.

The pastors' retreat ministry continued to expand in several ways. Participants began to involve other pastors, pastors' and wives' retreats were commenced, and issues of social justice were included. The impact of the so-called Third Wave of the Charismatic movement also became a consideration. Many of those involved produced resources and written papers describing their experiences.

In various states there were said to be a number of churches "with credible Renewal Church models" which were associated in some way with the retreats. Training of leaders developed and expansion took place to other states (including Tasmania) as well as to other denominations (Churches of Christ). Facilitators for women's groups were also part of the mix.

Back in Queensland

In the early 1980s Les Scarborough and John Cox were involved in leading renewal retreats for Baptist pastors in Queensland. A few pastors had felt the need for this kind of ministry and so the initial retreat was held at the Tamborine Baptist Convention Centre on 12-16 July 1982. It was a partially successful event

although with some moments of tension. However, it was not repeated, although a few one-off retreats were held with the same NSW leaders in the following few years.

Then, as with NSW, there came a pause for reflection and readjustment, until the new three-year cycle

of Sunday-Thursday retreats emerged. As Geoff Cramb noted, "To join a retreat a pastor needed to be convicted about a journey both theologically and experientially, in renewal. Pastoral support and encouragement were secondary and a by-product of the primary purpose of retreats being fulfilled." Retreats were to be a process, not a program, which differentiated them from other pastoral and lay retreats happening elsewhere.

During the period 1988-1992, there were, at various times, about seven groups involving about 40 pastors, including a group in North Queensland. There was also a "Women in Ministry" group (about eight members) which held the first such retreat for Queensland (and Australia) in October 1992. The overall movement came under the general supervision of the BUQ Department of Church Life and Growth (CLAG) and later *INTERcare* (of which Geoff Cramb was the director) but no direct reporting took place and the confidentiality of the groups was maintained.

The retreat movement continued during the 1990s, and by 2001, there were about 120 people involved. There had been numerous reports of benefit, including instances of those who were rescued or prevented from ministry disaster. Participation was by invitation, the range of theological views was extensive and invitations to join a retreat communicated personally, with a waiting list being the norm. Cramb explained, "Commitment to the group was paramount. No part-time attenders were allowed."

After about 2010, there was a change by the Baptist Union of Queensland in its official approach to pastoral care. But the pastors' retreat movement continued in other ways and in a wide variety of locations, with perhaps up to 40% of pastors (male and female) benefitting and some conducting retreats for their own people.

Midbar

While this pastors' retreat movement was growing strongly, a wider development was also gathering pace, more in the tradition of the spiritual retreats that had



Midbar ready to open

been part of Christian churches over many centuries, either in solitude or in community. This movement goes back ultimately to the Desert Fathers of the 3rd century in Egypt, but more particularly to the 16th century Jesuits and developments in 19th Anglican churches. The 20th century saw a considerable

expansion of this trend ecumenically in such developments as the Cursillo Movement with its three-day retreats especially for lay people. There was significant interest at Windsor Road Baptist Church in particular, led especially by Dawn Courtman, one of the pastors, who had caught from Les Scarborough the vision of retreats for local church laity. She was also in contact with friends in Victoria and New Zealand who were active in this ministry and who provided encouragement and ideas. By 1988 a vision for a retreat centre was gradually coming to the fore. There had been difficulty finding ideal locations for retreats, so a purpose-designed facility dedicated to this role was an attractive idea!

By October 1991 a Retreat Ministry Group had been formed with the official recognition of the Baptist Union. Two of the five members came from Windsor Road. The idea of using the Boscombe Road land was already being discussed. The group was invited by the Baptist Union to prepare a feasibility study on retreats for Baptists in Queensland. By May 1992, this detailed study had been completed, and it made the strong recommendation that a retreat ministry should be "encouraged and promoted", and that the Boscombe Road land be used as a base. It was affirmed that "this retreat ministry is a movement of the Spirit of God and He is challenging us as a denomination to move forward with Him in faith."

A positive response was received to the idea of using the Boscombe Road property, so more details were fleshed out and by the end of the year, the land was made available. The name "Midbar" was also adopted, bearing in mind its frequent use in the book of Exodus. Here it was the place where Moses led the people and signified, as the explanatory brochure stated, "a sense of divine presence, the freedom of God and the lack of human control", embracing the idea that people "of faith are on a journey." In the meantime, valuable assistance was received from Peter Bickerton, an architect in membership at Windsor Road church, in developing detailed plans for the site and buildings.

The land was covered with bush and lantana, so during 1993 and into 1994 many working bees ("Lantana Bashes") were held to clear it and prepare a roadway and car park. At the Half-Yearly Assembly in 1993, a promotional video, 'The Dream of Midbar', was screened.



Rev Dr Geoff Cramb

At first it was intended to erect basic buildings on the site, such as pole cabins, but then in a surprise move, in late 1994, Windsor Road church offered its manse building. The church had decided to sell the manse, but the purchaser wanted an empty block. So the church had to find some way of disposing of the building!

Finalisation of the plan to move the manse took place in early 1995 and \$15,000 was made available by the Baptist Union Finance and Property Committee (derived from Baptist camping funds) and the church offered \$28,000.

The removal took place in stages, and, once on site, a great deal of effort by a many volunteers was put into renovating, painting and fitting it out. There was further site work carried out and the final building inspection took place on 30 August 1996.

While operational at this stage, there was a long "wish list" of development ideas and proposed additional activities that gave a glimpse of the wide-ranging vision the group hoped to implement. The pole-house concept was still in mind to provide individual self-contained cabins for retreatants. There was no funding available—further development would be a matter of faith (as it had been from the outset).

Major Set-back

A few day retreats were held and only one overnight, but just as the "dream of Midbar" was becoming a reality, a serious setback was encountered. During the time leading up to the opening of the Centre in 1996, extensive negotiations had been held with the Brisbane City Council to gain proper consent for the use of the property, with several professionally skilled people participating in the hope of ensuring that the process ran as smoothly and effectively as possible.

All seemed to be proceeding smoothly until hostile objections from local residents began to appear. Despite the detailed and frequent explanations that the property would be used only by small numbers of people at a time and for prayer retreats only, there was a strong feeling being circulated vociferously that it was to be

used as a drug rehab centre or the like—a development that was unacceptable to residents of the area! During the latter part of 1996 and into 1997, there were various meetings held and other initiatives undertaken to explain the nature of the project to the local people.

The End of the Dream

These objections proved to be so strong, especially the threat of expensive court action, that the usage of the property was limited. So before long, its future was in doubt.

The property reverted to the control of the Baptist Theological College, but it was not used for any particular college purpose. In 2005, the college re-located its activities to the new Baptist Union headquarters at Gaythorne.

The entire property (the Boscombe Road block and the main section at 179 Gold Creek Road) was transferred to the Baptist camping ministry. The Boscombe

Road block was retained for a few years, but not used for any camping activity. It was sold off in 2010 as surplus to requirements.

The former principal's residence of the college was



Miss Dawn Courtman

later converted into a retreat centre, and the Baptist Union acquired a cottage at Mt Kanigan, near Gympie, for similar use. For several years during the late 1990s Doug Cran operated his own small group retreat centre at Glass House Mountains. The Baptist camp at Mount Tamborine was also a popular venue.

Over the years, various pastors also became involved in retreats which were organised privately or in a low key informal way apart from any official denominational program. There has been no reporting of retreats in Baptist Union documents for many years.

But the dream of Midbar, a place of intimacy with God, was dead!

Note: The above account is only part of the full story of the Retreat movement in Queensland. BHQ and the Baptist Church Archives would like to expand their files on this topic to give more adequate treatment. So readers with more information are invited to contact us and contribute to this project.

My First One Hundred Days...

by

Dr Pamela Condie, OAM



format photos) from the server. I am extremely grateful to QB for provision of a new desk top computer with ample memory and a new laptop (also with good storage). Our IT folk have also patiently provided help throughout this period.

The next challenge was accepting responsibility for dealing with the wide variety of requests received by the Archives. Some have been quite straightforward and easily answered to everyone's satisfaction. Some have been quite challenging – requiring the investment of quite a lot of time in seeking out the answers. However,

there has always been a level of satisfaction in delving through our records and being able to provide relevant, appropriate information in response. Here's a slightly off-beat example that left me chuckling:

Email Query: "Could you please advise if there was ever a Baptist Church on the corner of X and Y streets in the Brisbane suburb of M? I'm researching our local church history."

Answer (after some hours of research): "No. We have no record of any BUQ church ever being on that particular site. There was a church of another denomination on that location, however."

Response: "I knew I was right. Thank you! You've just confirmed it."

Very, very occasionally, I 've encountered a "researcher" who has not been satisfied with our responses and efforts, and who may express reluctance to accept "we cannot help you any further" as an answer. But, overwhelmingly, I must say that those who lodge requests have been extremely grateful for the information we have been able to provide in response to their queries—and these definitely outweigh the other minor frustrations.

A significant area of research has included denominational admin requests regarding issues such as clarification of church provenance, individual churches researching their history in preparation for significant milestone anniversaries, and family members seeking information relating to their family histories, just to name a few.

Searches involved consulting various indexes to locate references; then extracting relevant information

Introduction

After some months of serving an "internship" under Dr David Parker's tutelage, I officially commenced in the position of Queensland Baptists' Archives Officer on 1st July this year. When initially approached to consider accepting this role, I had been hesitant and sought to determine if this was really God's leading, and eventually accepted the position – with a view to commencing on 1st September as my husband and I had been planning a trip around Australia during winter 2020. However, Covid soon put paid to those plans and I was able to bring the commencement date forward.

During lock-down I focused on studying the Archives' Manual and undertaking impromptu tests set by David Parker, via email. Next, with a limited return to the Archives' office, I undertook two months of on-site interning under David Parker's supervision and instruction, and officially commenced on 1st July.

At the time of writing this, I have been QB's Archives' officer for over three months –and it is, perhaps, timely to reflect upon those first 100+ days. Let me say up front, this role has not been without its challenges as I rapidly moved from an "L" plated beginner to a tentative "P" plater.

Addressing (and overcoming) the Challenges

As I exchanged my L plates to become a red "P-plater", I realized that this would be the beginning of the hands-on period of practical application of what I had endeavoured to absorb as a learner.

One of the first challenges to be overcome was dealing with our outdated main computer. Its memory capacity was virtually zero and it could not cope with downloading any of our larger files (e.g. tiff

from files, Year Books, issues of the qb magazine or the Australian Baptist, digital photographs. These are some of the most popular requests.

Celebrations

I was privileged to attend the unveiling of a memorial plaque on the wall of the City North Baptist Church (formerly Nundah church) at the end of October along with representatives of the Baptist Historical Society Queensland (BHQ). This plaque faces directly onto a pedestrian thoroughfare and marks the historical significance of the Baptist presence in the Nundah area of suburban Brisbane.

The Future

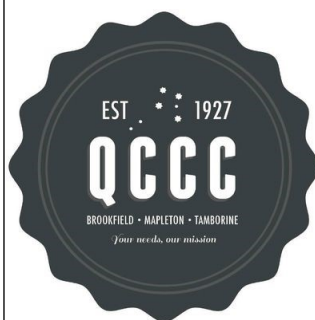
The importance of the QB Archives as the official repository of denominational historical records cannot

be overstated. The challenge for this particular section of the QB Services Group is to continue to seek opportunities to raise denominational awareness of its value. This will involve seeking continued opportunities for publicity and promotion through denominational publications, our presence at events, and raising awareness of our service.

One very encouraging event occurred when the Director of Pastoral Services (David Elvery) included a tour of the Archives in the new pastor induction conference on 3rd November. David Parker was available to introduce three groups of new pastors to the Archives and our services.

We are looking forward to embracing other future opportunities.

New Book on the Way—Baptist Camping in Queensland



Baptist Heritage Qld has a new book on the way—a history of Baptist Camping in Queensland. It will be a successor to the original history of camping which was written by Joan Maxwell and published in two parts in the early 1990s. The last 30 years will be covered by the new book.

It was providential that the first history was published at that time, covering the first 60 years of the ministry, because after that point Camping began to change dramatically. In fact, camping in the second more recent stage is hardly recognizable in comparison with the old, featuring as it does new properties, new activities and new goals. Camping is now the second largest ministry of the Baptists in Queensland and the second oldest operation of the Baptist Union (on the college is older) It adopted its

present name, Queensland Conference and Camping Centres (QCCC) in 2002.

The new book covers the changes, each major step taking place conveniently in each of the three decades since, culminating in the last 10 years under the key leadership of Andrew Grant as director.

Camping now comprises four sites, Mapleton, Tamborine, Brookfield and Noosa, with a staff of over 120 people looking after around 50,000 guests through its doors each year. (Former sites at Torquay, Emu Park and Toowoomba no longer operate.) It has recently been elevated to a Charter Group within the Baptist Union, alongside the college, Carinity and others, with a team of dedicated and expert leaders standing alongside the Director in managing the multi-million dollar organisation.



Part of the former Barrawinga camp site at Torquay

QCCC was hit badly by the restrictions imposed under COVID-19, having to close operations during the middle of 2020. It has since begun to re-open. Its finances were very seriously affected and it has received significant assistance from the Baptist Union.

The earlier books on the history of camping are still available for sale from Baptist Heritage Qld (enquiries BHQ Publications, Ph 3376 4339). Details of the new publication have not yet been finalised but it is expected the book, which will be about the same size as each of the two earlier volumes, will be available in the new year. Former leaders and participants in the camping ministry have been generous with their assistance in compiling the story. It is hoped that the new story will fill in many gaps about how this highly significant ministry has overcome many obstacles and grasped a wide vision to become what it is today.

Baptist Heritage Queensland Annual — Meeting News

The 36th Annual meeting of the Baptist Historical Society of Queensland was held on 7 Nov 2020 and for the first time, it was extended by Zoom to include remote participants. It is intended to offer this facility in the future in the hope of widening participation.

There were at least three significant developments. First, Bill Hughes stood down after 5 years as Secretary. Dr David Parker was appointed acting Secretary instead. Then, Dr Pam Condie brought her first report as Archivist, showing much progress despite Covid-19. Another important development was the appointment of Ian McQuay as Webmaster and the decision to develop a separate website for BHQ, to replace the current shared arrangement. The chair, Eric Kopittke, thanked Bill Hughes for his dedicated and efficient service as Secretary over the previous 5 years and wished him well in his 'retirement'. Bill said he hoped to complete more historical projects including his current venture on the history of the Queensland Home Mission, which is proving to be full of interest.

Secretary's Annual Report — 2020

At the AGM in October 2019 the following appointments were made: Eric Kopittke (President), Bill Hughes (Secretary), Hope Colegrove (Treasurer) and Rosemary Kopittke (Publications Officer).

BHQ's finances remain in a healthy position. Further details are contained in the Treasurer's report.

Further work on BHQ's "Plaques Project" is continuing although progress has been slow. To date historical plaques have been installed on the site of the United Evangelical Church, the Windsor Road Baptist Church, the City Tabernacle Baptist Church and the Toowong Baptist Church. To date little progress has been made on installing a plaque on the former Petrie Terrace church building. After a long-drawn out process a plaque on the North East Baptist Church at Nundah was installed on 26 October 2020.

BHQ continues to maintain a presence at the Annual Conventions through manning a display table of literature and photographs. For the last two years BHQ publications have been on display at the Annual Assembly and a small number of sales have been achieved.

The Archives page in the Queensland Baptist (published six times each year) was expanded during the current year and prior to the Covid 19 shutdown was two full pages of interesting information of an historical nature. We are currently waiting on a decision to be made on the resumption of production of the Queensland Baptist.

The BHQ publication Queensland Baptist Forum has again been produced on a quarterly basis this year. The Forum goes to those on our membership list and others. It contains a variety of interesting articles, mainly on historical subjects, but also covers other matters such as Baptist principles. Digital copies of Forum are available in the Archives. Much of the work for producing this report four times a year is undertaken by Dr Parker.

This is my last Secretary's report as I am not standing for re-election this year. I intend to devote more time to research and writing in the Archives.

Bill Hughes, **Secretary**

Archives Report — Highlights

Dr Pam Condie was appointed Archivist by the Baptist Union of Queensland and took over duties on 1 July 2020. This was during the midst of the Covid pandemic. The Archives had been closed to the public since March. It reopened on 4 Nov under Covid-safe rules. The resultant reduction (but not a cessation) in queries in the early months of 2020 made for a smooth transition and the chance to improve aspects of the operation in the process. However, from August onwards, a fairly regular stream of enquiries has been received. Some of these have involved a considerable amount of time in research. The regular staffing is now Dr Pam Condie, Archivist, Miss Anne Cameron and Dr David Parker as assistants, with Bill Hughes coming in regularly for research and writing. There are hopes of adding to this team.

Another major development has been the replacement of one of the Archives computers which had passed its use-by date. The new machine is up to date and has much larger capacity. A top quality slide scanner was donated to the Archives by BHSQ earlier in the year.

The halt in the production of the printed version of the QB magazine (and uncertainty about its future) has impacted severely on the ability of the Archives and BHQ to promote the work and disseminate historical information. Some items were published before the close down and also on the current electronic versions. It is to be hoped that this valuable medium of denominational information (going back almost 140 years!) is not lost.