

The Queensland Baptist Forum

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No. 109 August 2021

Baptist Heritage – 7th Historic Plaque Unveiled at Significant City Site



On Tues 25 May 2021, Baptist Heritage Queensland (BHQ) unveiled the seventh plaque in their Historic Plaque Project. This was at the site of the first Baptist church building in Queensland, 38 Wharf Street, Brisbane. It was unveiled by Rev Richard Kingham, interim pastor of the successor church City Tabernacle and Tim Weston, CEO (pictured) of StudentOne, the current owners of the site. A small Covid-safe group of BHQ, City Tabernacle and StudentOne people witnessed the occasion.

The original building, known as Wharf Street Baptist Church, was opened on 6 Feb 1859. The land and building cost about £2000. Previously the church, which was formed in 1855, met in public buildings, including law courts. The church seated 250, was 57 feet by 34 feet in size, and was built by Andrew Petrie in the Early Italianate Style.

Rev B G Wilson was the pastor until 1878. He was followed by Rev H Coombs and then the famous Rev William Whale. The church was extended by 41 feet in 1881 at a cost of £2000 but soon it was too small, so the property was sold in 1888 for £16,000. The last service was held on 5 Oct 1890 and the church transferred under its new name of City Tabernacle, to its new structure in Wickham Terrace. The old site was used for various purposes over the years, including some small congregations and commercial enterprises, one of which was Radio 4BC. The site is now home to a multi-million dollar student accommodation complex.

Thanks is expressed to StudentOne for their interest and the City Tabernacle church for their financial support. Baptist Heritage Qld has hopes of continuing its Historic Plaque Project in the future with plans for installations at other significant sites. The previous plaque was unveiled at City North Baptist Church, Nundah on 26 October 2020. Enquiries are welcome.

BHSQ News

The regular meeting of BHQ took place on June 19 with a number of interesting items on the agenda. One was a report on the new BHQ website (bhsq.org) with sections for BHQ, the Archives and the National Guide. It was also announced that a 'Friends of BHQ' facebook page had been created. See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/878493442730886>

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BHQ Meetings 2021: Nov 6 (AGM) 2pm at The Baptist Archives

Zoom attendance available by arrangement

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Mrs Marianne Slade

Robert Gribben, AM

This article is the second prize winner ('highly commended') in the Baptist Historical Society of Victoria 2020 Essay Competition. The subject is the wife of third pastor of Rockhampton Baptist Church, Queensland, Rev George Slade (1881–85). The author is Emeritus Professor of Theology at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. This article is published with permission.



Marianne and George Slade, the only photograph we have of her. Taken in 1857 at their wedding.

How often have we heard a tribute to a fine pastor at his farewell, where someone has used the well-worn 'behind every great man...' but perhaps added little that was adequate to the supporter? I suppose the reverse is true with women pastors these days, but the result is often an imbalance. For various reasons, some of them simply practical, we tend to focus on one person, and the spouse – and the children – take second place. That is true of my subject: Marianne, the wife of the great Baptist pioneer home missionary, the Rev. George Slade. Although the church newspapers of the time record tributes to her husband, there is almost no reference to her at all. But given who her husband was, and what he did, what she also must have done deserves more. I want to try to tell her story.

Marianne's parents

Marianne Croggon was born to devout Methodist parents, though neither began as Methodists. Walter Oke Croggon (1791–1854),¹ her father, was born into a strong Nonconformist family, both Congregational and Baptist, from Grampound-with-Creed, a double village in Cornwall. He always used his middle name to distinguish himself from his cousin Walter Croggon, who was a highly esteemed preacher in the local Baptist Chapel. Our Walter at age 19 became a Methodist after the persuasive preaching of two visiting Methodist missionaries, began as a Local Preacher in the Truro Circuit in 1817 and then a probationer for the ministry in three Cornish circuits, Penzance, St Austell and Liskeard, moving annually, until he was 'received into Full Connexion', the usual prelude to ordination, in 1821. One testimonial declares, 'it was his delight to preach the Gospel, and he was ready to proclaim its truths in any place, the road-side, the

cottage, the deck of a ship, the barrack-room, the school-room, the church, were all alike to him'.²

Her mother was born Mary Mullis (1799–1830), from St Germans, at the eastern border of Cornwall. Her parents were farmers but fell on hard times. She moved to Liskeard to learn dressmaking as a trade and worked for 'the most respectable families' in nearby parishes. She learned reading, writing, and sewing at two local schools. Mary attended worship at the Parish Church (that is, Church of England) in nearby Menheniot, where she appreciated the minister's addresses – but Methodists were also in Menheniot and at one of their meetings, in June 1819, Mary joined their ranks.³ She regularly walked the four miles (6 km) from her cottage to Liskeard for morning service, then (with some bread and cheese) walked to Menheniot for the service there, often walking more than ten miles (16 km) a Sunday. 'She had a good gift in prayer, expressing herself scripturally and fervently' and was assiduous in visiting the sick (once picking up measles) and distributing tracts. One is reminded of the heroine of George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede*, about a young Methodist woman preacher.⁴

These two lives connected when Walter Oke Croggon was appointed to the Methodist cause in Liskeard. But Walter was next stationed as a missionary to France, spending a year near Nîmes, where French Reformed Protestants were numerous, and with whom the Wesleyan Missions cooperated. He returned to Cornwall and on 5 August 1822 married his Mary in the St German's Church of England – Methodists being unable to conduct marriages in their own buildings. The couple immediately embarked for France, and from 1823–26 served a community of 500 skilled Welsh and English workers imported to establish the iron founding industry at Charenton-le-Pont, then a village, but now a suburb of Paris.

Marianne's childhood

It was there that Marianne was born on 11 July 1824 and about fifteen months later, a boy was born, named Henry Martyn, after the great missionary (1781–1812) to India and Persia. Henry suddenly died at the age of three months. Mary was so sick she went back to her family in Cornwall to recuperate, almost certainly taking the 18-month-old Marianne with her, returning to Nîmes after about three months. In November 1826, the Wesleyan Missionary Society appointed the Croggons to Zante (Zakynthos), an island off the mainland of Greece, to oversee the missions in that region. On 30 May 1827, another daughter was born, named Sarah Andromache, but she also died after only six months. The Ionian islands were under the protection of the King of England, and

troops were stationed there. Walter and Mary first worked amongst the regiments, before slowly building a community of 'learning and vital piety' (to use Charles Wesley's words) among the Greek population and the English residents. Walter's was part of a network of Methodist stations around the Mediterranean, who cooperated with local Protestants where possible. The schools Walter and Mary founded are now part of a university.

It can be assumed that little Marianne found her playmates among the Greeks, and no doubt learned her letters and sewing along with their classes. Mary fell pregnant again, lost the baby, and was again very sick. She had set herself the task of learning Greek, to be able to teach her pupils to read Matthew's Gospel in their own – and its original – language. In the deeply affectionate obituary to his wife (on which I have drawn),⁵ Walter mentions her sickness without naming its cause. He describes how surgery was agreed upon by the doctors and carried out. She barely survived the operation, briefly recovering consciousness and dying during her husband's anguished prayer: 'O God, send thy holy angels to take charge of her spirit, and bear it to the realms of bliss, for Christ's sake. Amen'. She died on 6 August 1830, aged 31. Her body lies, with all but one of her infants, under a table-tomb in the English cemetery, which we have visited.⁶ The grave inscription shows that she lost another baby son the day she died.

Marianne was now aged six, but without her mother who had so closely shared Walter's work. It is likely that when Walter attended the Methodist Conference in Bristol in 1831, he took Marianne with him.⁷ He arranged for her to return to Cornwall, to the market town of Grampound-with-Creed (between St Austell and Truro) where her father's family had lived for three centuries, and to where her Aunt Polly (his unmarried sister) cared for her, with her grandmother Anne.⁸ No doubt she mourned and missed her mother greatly; we know her father kept in touch by letter and visits.⁹ Marianne lived among the Croggons for some twenty further years, attending school and growing up through childhood and teens. It is unlikely that Cornish life would have changed much from her mother's day – her weeks filled with home duties, chapel, prayer meetings, and tea-meetings. In villages like these, where the local population was related to almost everyone, doctrinal differences counted little. Marianne's grandmother was known as a devout Baptist when she died at the age of 90, still caring for Walter in Ireland.¹⁰ Marianne continued as a Methodist, which was not difficult in Cornwall! John Wesley had preached in Grampound on three occasions, and although he recorded no conversions in his journal, the seed had been sown. It was when the young Baptist preached in her Methodist chapel that George and Marianne first set eyes on each other.

Meeting George – and going to Geelong

George Slade's life and ministry is well told elsewhere.¹¹ By the age of 19 he had settled on the Baptist tradition as his church, been baptised, and spent four years at the distinguished Baptist Theological College in Bristol, where he was a star pupil. He was then appointed

successively to two congregations over six years in Cornwall, Redruth and then Grampound, where he met the young Marianne Croggon, 'petite with long wavy auburn hair'.¹² She had just turned 30. George had done his theological homework and decided that he was a 'General Baptist', as distinct from a Particular Baptist. The difference nowadays has largely to do with whether persons baptized as infants are admitted to Baptist fellowship, but there are also theological issues around the doctrine of Predestination, which need not detain us here – except to note that that on the latter, the General Baptists were very close to the theological position Marianne's father held as a Wesleyan Methodist, and to John Wesley's 'Evangelical Arminianism'.¹³ As the Slades were about to find out, it was fortunate that the young couple were doctrinally united.

They married in 1857, just before leaving for their mission station in Geelong, where they arrived on 26 April 1858, with Marianne pregnant.¹⁴ They had hoped to go to India, but the Mission Board changed the station at the last minute. It took the Aberdeen Street congregation fewer than two Sundays to find they had called the wrong man; they had asked for a strict Calvinist. However, the people at Fenwick Street, nearby, were keen to welcome George, and when they joined the Victorian Baptist Union, they became its only General Baptist congregation.¹⁵ There George stayed 19 years. Marianne sang in the choir and enjoyed the annual performance of Handel's Messiah. The manse was in Retreat Street, Mercer's Hill (now Newtown), within easy walking distance of church and schools.¹⁶

What was the Geelong like to which the Slades had been sent by the Mission Board? There was a township by 1838 and it was the largest town in Victoria in 1850. It grew rapidly during the gold rush. The first country railway, Geelong to Melbourne, was opened in 1857. The new municipality of Newtown, where they lived, began in 1858, the year they arrived; some grand houses were built on the hill, and the Sacred Heart school and orphanage was in their street. The remarkable growth of Geelong in the late 1850s ceased in the 1860s, when it gained the name of 'Sleepy Hollow', but recovery proceeded in the 1870s until they left. All this took place on the lands of the Wathaurrong people, but the combination of the imported culture and disease and the loss of hunting grounds had already taken its deadly toll.

There are difficulties living in a new suburb. Water was slow in being connected; probably Marianne began with tank water or a standing pipe in the street. Gas was coming available, but electricity was decades away. Every domestic duty – cooking, cleaning, bathing, laundry – required hard work. The children were no doubt organized to take a suitable part of the load. Sundays meant walking to Fenwick Street, for church and Sunday School, and to meetings during the week.¹⁷ On the more luxurious side, they owned a horse-drawn buggy and loved to drive down to Torquay for summer holidays.¹⁸

The five children

The baby Marianne was carrying was duly born and named Arthur Croggon (1858-1933). The local congregation gave financial support for his going to Mr

Leechman's private school in Geelong, and further when it became The Geelong College.¹⁹

A daughter, Rotha, was born two years later and was the apple of her mother's eye, a support at home and much loved in the congregation where she played the harmonium and encouraged good hymn singing. Sadly, she died of typhoid fever at age 18 in 1878; her father rushed home arriving two days before she died. The death hit them all hard, her father having baptized her three years earlier, and knowing she had such promise. The In Memoriam describes her as 'bright, thoughtful beyond her years, considerate for everyone but herself'. It also recounts the conversation with her mother in the last week of her life: 'Is it possible to be baptized twice?' 'For', she said, 'if I get better, I should like to be baptised again to tell the world how much I love Jesus'.²⁰

Two more years after Rotha's birth, Arthur George Blanchard (1862–1924) was born. Known by his third name, he is still remembered among the Baptists in Ascot Vale/Moonee Ponds and Flemington and beyond. He also attended Mr Leechman's School in Geelong, and in the 'Third Class' in 1872 won a prize for Reading and Elocution. Blanchard took up iron-mongering and set up a shop in Newmarket/Flemington, not far from the family home.

After Rotha's death, Marianne looked more and more to her next daughter for companionship. Edith Marianne (1864–1939)²¹ was indeed a help at home, and gifted; she needed a school to enhance her artistic and musical skills. Marianne rented a small cottage in Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) and in 1880, when Edith turned 16, she enrolled at the Presbyterian Ladies College, then in Albert Street, East Melbourne.²²

Their last child, Frederick William (1866–1935) was born in Newtown like all his siblings. But in 1877, another major upheaval in the family's life occurred.

The Call to Home Missions

In September 1877, at the age of 52, George was called by the Baptist Home Mission to serve in northern Victoria. It has been observed that George might well have sought something more comfortable for the last stage of his ministry, but that would have been contrary to his nature. As a former President of the Union, he might well have gained a city pulpit. Instead, he went bush. The farewell was a major civic event. One speaker declared that they had had 'a preacher who has declared faithfully and with great ability, the whole counsel of God, but that in its pastor it has had a noble, large-hearted Christian friend whose character and power have been such as to command perfect confidence and love'. Nothing is recorded in relation to Marianne, except to wish her and the family well.

Husband and wife no doubt prayed earnestly about this call. There were great costs to them both and to the family. Their decision would have been made in firm faith in God's protection and assurance. The children remained in the sole care of Marianne for three and a half years, while George was an itinerant preacher serving a scattered rural community centred on Kerang in north-west Victoria. The five children then (1878) ranged in

age from 19 to 11, roughly two years apart, a time when a father's presence would have been beneficial. The move meant that they lost the use of the Retreat Street house and there was no suitable accommodation in Kerang.

The family first moved to Whitehall Street,²³ 'Footscrae' (as George spelled it in a letter to a church paper), and this really marked the breakup of the family unit. The older boys were at work; Rotha died the following year; and Edith began at PLC. Monies coming in for the house were unpredictable; Marianne was reluctant to ask for help, and Edith saw the strain on her. Young Fred was baptized by his father at the Emerald Hill Baptist Church, at age 12 on 21 July 1878 on a visit to Melbourne.²⁴ He first attended 'Mr Smith's State School, Emerald Hill', now in 'Albert Park'.²⁵ He entered Wesley College, the Methodist boys' school in St Kilda Road, Melbourne, in 1882, for one year as a 'Day Pupil'.²⁶

Rockhampton

There can be no doubt that George's mission in northern Victoria took a toll on his health. For several reasons, he decided his time there was over, and literally without a farewell, left for Geelong, then soon after for Queensland, where he had accepted a call as pastor to the Rockhampton town church.²⁷ After making the arrangements for Emerald Hill, he left in January and Marianne joined him six months later. Daughter Edith also came and they spent some three years there.²⁸ The single reference to his wife and daughter was 'His family will be missed from the sphere of usefulness in which they were zealously engaged', and we do not doubt it.²⁹ By now George was completely exhausted, in ill-health, bearing the marks of disappointment in his recent role.

In December 1884³⁰ they moved back to 73 Railway Place, in Newmarket (now Flemington), where there too their family were regarded as pioneers. George preached at and led Sunday School at Ascot Vale, the adjoining suburb, with Blanchard succeeding him. He presided at the ceremony for each of his children who married. He died on Sunday morning, 13th April 1890, aged 65, after a bout of pneumonia.³¹

Marianne's last years

Marianne lived on a further seven years at Railway Place. She continued working in the neighbourhood and the congregation. The Fenwick Street congregation diminished on George's departure in 1878, but grew under later pastors, and in fact gave birth over the years to several new 'mission bands' which grew into chapels when sufficient numbers justified their establishment. But Fenwick Street also expanded into 'Fenwick Memorial' Church, now the Manifold Heights Baptist Chapel further north on Shannon Avenue. George Slade is honoured in this building as the founding pastor. Marianne kept in regular touch with this congregation. Her name, and those of her husband and daughter Edith (Mrs Lawrence) appear on the extraordinary 1907 embroidered tablecloth in the Baptist Union's historical collection.³²

She died in her daughter Edith's home at 239 Gold Street, Clifton Hill, just around the corner from the Baptist Church, on Sunday 26 December 1897, the day after Christmas, aged 73.³³ She is buried in the Melbourne



The Fenwick Memorial Church linen tablecloth, 1907, embroidered with Marianne and Edith's names

General Cemetery beside her husband George and daughter Rotha.

Marianne Slade née Croggon had all the virtues, and more, of the capable wife described in Proverbs chapter 31. She had to. The capable husband was fully employed somewhere else for a great deal of their marriage. She was George's constant and faithful supporter, and their children's guardian and guide. Together, and apart, they enabled the remarkable ministries of George Slade. Her children, and many others, rise up and call her blessed.³⁴

Notes

- 1 Hill's Alphabetical Arrangement of Wesleyan Methodist Ministers (1852) gives details of the appointments Croggon served. I acknowledge assistance in finding sources from Dr Robin Roddie, Methodist Study Centre, Manchester, UK. There are regular reports from Croggon in The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine and in the Minutes of Conference, some of which are available in the Sugden Heritage Collection, Queen's College, University of Melbourne. My thanks to the archivist, Dr Jennifer Bars.
- 2 Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, March 1854, p. 279, under the heading 'Death of Missionaries'.
- 3 So, her obituary in The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine for April 1833, 'Memoir for Mrs Mary Croggon, by her husband, The Rev. Walter O. Croggon, Missionary in Zante.'
- 4 The genealogical work on Croggon and Mullis lines is available through the usual on-line sources. My thanks to the Genealogical Society of Victoria and their library research assistants.
- 5 In her Memoir, in the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine for April 1833, pp 241-249.
- 6 The visit to Zakynthos took place 27-30 May 2012. My thanks to Mr Adis Ladikos and the staff of the archaeological project for the English Cemetery which had been closed to the public – for opening it! On the tombstone the final verse is engraved in New Testament Greek, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord', Revelation 14:13.
- 7 I have benefitted from reading two fine family histories, both by great granddaughters, the first of which, is by Grace [and Philip] Lind, Family Stories: After the Brolly (2005), p. 39. Grace Marianne Lind née Hawley descends from George and Marianne through their son Blanchard. Mrs Lind says Marianne left in June 1834; this is quite possible, as her father had then gone to Bristol as a circuit minister. Since Walter's work involved much time travelling, it seemed to me he might have chosen to take her to the family earlier.

- 8 Amy Bane & Mary Oliver, The Book of Grampound-with-Creed, Tiverton: Halsgrove Press, 1998. In 1841, the joint population was 748. In 1834, Walter was appointed to the Kingswood circuit in Bristol; in 1836, he was appointed Superintendent of Irish Schools and Missions where he stayed until 1850.
- 9 It is possible she visited him in Dublin. Lind, After the Brolly, p. 39.
- 10 Walter followed his 14 years in Ireland with circuit ministry in Tunbridge Wells and Sittingbourne, both in Kent. He died on 7 February 1854, aged 63. He had remarried in 1845, Miss Lucy Emra, a writer and poet, who was godmother to the hymn writer Frances Ridley Havergal.
- 11 I thank the Rev. John Sampson for guidance in the archives of the Baptist Union on several occasions. Among the principal sources for Slade's ministry are F.J. Wilkin, Baptists in Victoria, Our First Century, 1838-1938, East Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1939, Eric J. Daley (ed.), Great is Thy Faithfulness, One Hundred Years of Baptist Work and Witness in the Northern District of Victoria, 1877-1988, Kerang: Northern District Baptist Association, Geoff Holland, 'Baptist Beginnings in Geelong' in All Our Yesterdays, the Victorian Baptist Historical Society journal, vol 2, 1994, and several journals, which I was able to read in the Archives.
- 12 The second great granddaughter's history is by Mary Elizabeth Knapman, A Crease in the Fabric, A Biography of George Slade of Hanslope, East Kurrajong NSW, 2003, p. 14ff. Mrs Knapman is linked through the Slades' daughter Edith (Mrs Alfred Hughes Lawrence), as is my wife Susan Elizabeth Anderson.
- 13 The descriptions used for the different congregations varies from place to place. To be precise, 'The Particular Baptists adhered to the doctrine of a particular atonement—that Christ died only for an elect—and were strongly Calvinist (following the Reformation teachings of John Calvin) in orientation; the General Baptists held to the doctrine of a general atonement—that Christ died for all people and not only for an elect—and represented the more moderate Calvinism of Jacobus Arminius, a 17th-century Dutch theologian' (Encyclopedia Britannica, see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baptist/History#ref466518> . My thanks to Dr David Parker for this reference). They all held to a Congregationalist form of church government, also from slightly different origins. See also Knapman, 22-23.
- 14 The Geelong Advertiser, 27 April 1858, in the Shipping News, p. 3.
- 15 According to the Fenwick Street Jubilee Booklet (1907) under the heading 'First Beginnings'. They joined the Union in 1863.
- 16 The Baptist Union archives have no record of a manse. The Geelong and Western District Directory of 1861, when it lists the town's clergy, only gives the church address, thus 'Rev. G. Slade, Fenwick Street'. He is not listed as a ratepayer (so perhaps the church paid them), but in the street-by-street list of occupiers, we find him in 'Retreat Road, Newtown', a short street off Pakington Street.
- 17 See also Knapman, 25-6.
- 18 Lind, p. 42.
- 19 Mrs Knapman, p. 27 says Geelong Grammar, but Geelong College archives show him enrolling in April 1873. The College campus was probably a walk or a bike-ride away from George's manse in Newtown. He trained as an accountant. He successively married two sisters who were Roman Catholics (a 1873 Victorian Act was ahead of English

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Baptists in Queensland and COVID-19

by David Parker

The 'Spanish 'Flu' epidemic struck Queensland a century ago, but there is hardly any reference to it in official Baptist records. That is far from the case with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020—documents about it have proliferated wildly! This is a brief personal account (May 2021) of how Baptists in Queensland responded over the first year. Baptist Heritage Qld/Baptist Archives intend to document fully the impact of COVID-19 and to collect key documents for the record. It is hoped to produce another version of this paper when more information requested from Baptist Union officials is received.

Note that information mentioned here is as accurate as possible but often official announcements were detailed and subject to many qualifications, and in the records dating was often ambiguous, making a precise account difficult. See *QB Forum* 106 August 2020 for our article, 'Baptists in Queensland and the Spanish 'Flu Epidemic, 1919'.

The COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (or perhaps much earlier) and the first death in that country was confirmed on 11 January 2020. It was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020. The first case in Australia appeared on 25 January 2020 in Victoria.

Little was known about the disease at first, and methods of handling it had to be developed quickly. Soon most countries were affected, many extremely seriously and with recurring waves, often amidst a lot of political wrangling and organisational failures. Towards the end of 2020, several vaccines had been developed, bringing some hope of controlling the pandemic, but there had been no other advances in handling the disease, and outbreaks in 2021 were in many cases, worse than ever.

By April 2021, more than 134 million cases had been recorded worldwide, with almost 3 million deaths, making it one of the worst pandemics in human history. In the meantime, the global economy and social fabric had been seriously disrupted.

COVID-19 in Queensland

The first case in Queensland was announced on 29 January 2020 and the same day, a public health emergency was declared by the state government (the first state to do so) and strengthened soon after, giving the Chief Health Officer immense powers to control the state in response to the pandemic, akin to 'martial law'. The number of cases increased in the following days until on 20 March Australia's international borders were closed. On 23 March many businesses and non-essential services were closed, causing enormous economic and personal hardship. Schools were closed from 26 March with children forced to be home-schooled, and on the same day, Queensland's borders were closed for the first time in 100 years.

The first death in Queensland was reported on 29 March (although a Queenslanders had died in NSW earlier). On 30 March, a lock-down began confining people to their homes except for certain specified reasons.

The worst of the crisis began to ease by the fourth week of April, without the thousands of deaths and totally overwhelmed medical system originally feared. On 26 April, the first relaxation of stay-at-home restrictions was

announced to take effect on 1 May. For the rest of the year, life in Queensland returned to a semblance of normality under various restrictions, some of which were increased or re-imposed, often at short notice, in response to outbreaks in various areas.

COVID-19 and Baptists in Queensland

The impact on churches was extensive with the closure of church services and home gatherings from 23 March, and severe restrictions on weddings and funerals. Church buildings displayed dismal 'Closed' signs.

The sudden imposition of these measures required churches to respond quickly by trying to offer at least some kind of ministry using whatever means were available. The widespread use of social media and the internet generally provided a partial solution through live-streaming or pre-recorded services.

However, because of the stay-at-home lock-down laws and the ban on non-essential businesses, church buildings could not be used for services, so on-line services were presented from homes. However, a ruling on 6 April (just in time for Easter) that churches were deemed places of work allowed for small numbers of staff only to conduct and video services in churches.

Pastors were faced with preaching to a camera only, musical teams had to be reduced drastically and production was limited to one camera operator. However, the successful (and as it turned out, long-term) use of technologies like these required capabilities that not all churches could support. This meant that in many cases, the quality was well below par in terms of content, presentation and technical skill. Furthermore, it seemed



that some were not aware of or concerned about the poor quality of these presentations. Contact with parishioners via Zoom or similar video conferencing platforms, and by phone and messaging services was also important. Church administration and organisational life required similar methods. The conduct of communion services and baptisms called for considerable adaption.

Financially churches were faced with the problem of not being able to depend on the traditional system of giving via collection plates, but electronic giving (which had already become more common) quickly took up the slack, resulting in good, even increased, support. Churches also benefitted from government financial aid with the result that, contrary to what might have been expected, the overall financial position of churches turned out to be more or less satisfactory.

Baptist Union responses

At the Baptist Union level, the first public statement came from the Director of QB Services (DOS), Rev Stewart Pieper, on 5 March 2020. It was a formal notice largely quoting verbatim from official government documents about the nature of COVID-19 and responses to it which, it was believed, 'might be of assistance' to churches. The statement ended by announcing, 'At this stage there is no need to cancel any events or gatherings or take additional precautions to normal practice.' However, on 23 March, the DOS issued a much more radical notice advising that church services, weddings and funerals were now all highly restricted.

From this point on for several weeks, there were many advisories and other documents from the Baptist Union, sometimes almost daily. These relayed the official government regulations (with some often convoluted notes on implementation), along with health directives, information about government financial aid, and other details, including just one of the many new issues to be considered—copyright requirements for on-line services. Churches were updated by the regular weekly emailed Baptist Union newsletters from the Director of Administration and the Director of Services, the latter usually concluding with a biblical text for encouragement.

The QB administration took rapid steps to respond to the new situation. The Board set up a specialised task force in early April to manage QB measures. Board meetings were conducted virtually and various other events were also transferred to this medium, including prayer gatherings involving pastors and churches.

Scheduled events and processes needed to be managed. The annual Convention and Business Day (Assembly), which was due to be held as soon as 14-17 April, was postponed to a date to be fixed. The Pastors and Spouses Conference usually held prior to the Assembly was summarily cancelled. Similarly, development of the annual budget, which would have been adopted at the Business Day, was postponed.

The print version of the *QB magazine* was suspended due, it was explained, to high production costs and



because of the cancellation of church services which were the main avenues of distribution. On-line versions continued but updating was spasmodic. The editor left the position after 12 months, and the print version remained suspended.

The QB office at Gaythorne was closed to the public as of 30 March, and the staff worked in two teams, week about at home and the office, with some on leave. A number of staff members were put off in early July due to the impact of the situation.

To help churches deal with the impact of the restrictions and the pandemic, the Baptist Union authorised Rev Mark Westhuyzen, who had only just taken up his role in the new position of Director of Pastoral Services, to offer assistance on the use of technology to conduct services, and importantly, to organise a series of on-line 'Pastors' Forums'. With the assistance of Rev Dr Ian Hussey (Malyon Theological College), these were conducted from 16 April 2020 (weekly at first) and covered a wide range of topics. The first was 'Maintaining Real Community in Social Isolation', and the next, 'Working from home'. Other topics included church finances under Covid, theological reflections on how the situation impacted thinking about the church and its mission, reviewing the progress and prospects of church life under Covid conditions, and later, when the situation was improving, the future of the church post-Covid, and strategies for recovery. From September, the frequency of these seminars was reduced, and the themes morphed into more general areas.

The interim Director of Movement (DOM), Rev Dr John Sweetman also distributed various documents reflecting on pastoral ministry, worship services and church life under Covid conditions, some of which were his own, and others contributions by other QB staff or drawn from additional sources. Topics included ideas for ministering in a Covid context (theoretical ideas and actual examples), biblical reflection on 'digital church' and the ideal length of sermons under Covid. The Baptist Union staff also prepared some sermon ideas and video sermons for use by churches, using a newly set-up studio at the QB Centre.

Particular attention was given to the Ethnic Churches, and Director, Rev Emil Rahimov, devoted much effort relaying and explaining to pastors and church leaders the details and implications of the various government regulations. Financially these churches were protected from some of the worst aspects of the pandemic because

most pastors were bi-vocational. However, the churches were typically under strain because they wanted to assist their families and church people in their homelands where the COVID-19 situation was typically extremely serious.

Impact on ministries

The various ministry arms of the Baptist Union were also impacted by the pandemic and the official measures dealing with it.

The camping ministry, QCCC, was affected seriously, due to the mandated shutting down of all school and other camping activity. From 20 March 2020, all camp sites were closed and about 120 staff stood down although significant help was to be received from the government JobKeeper scheme (especially for the newly opened Noosa camp site). QCCC reported that it suffered more than \$2.5 million in losses due to cancellation of bookings. Generous financial assistance and support from the Baptist Union and Baplink helped considerably. QCCC was proactive in the development of the industry plan for camping and in lobbying the government over the regulations.

The welfare arm, Carinity, was also affected seriously. In other states, there had been many outbreaks of Covid in aged care homes causing serious concern and lock-downs. However, Carinity only suffered one such case, which was at its Laidley facility where, as late as September 2020, a staff member contracted the disease, causing a two-week shut-down. However, all Carinity's aged care work came under the general restrictions which were routinely imposed by the government on this sector whenever there was an outbreak of the disease.

Malyon Theological College was also impacted, cancelling all physical lectures and activity from late March. But thanks to earlier developments in on-line learning, it was able to make cope and continued the year with little overall difficulty and with encouraging enrolments.

Recovery

By May 2020 there were definite signs that the restrictions imposed on the community would be lifted gradually and, over the next few weeks, a palpably hopeful feeling began to appear with the announcement that the curve of new cases had been 'flattened'. A 3-stage 'road to recovery' was announced by the federal government on 8 May, which would be applied in each state according to local conditions, followed by a very gradual reopening of some businesses, albeit with limited levels of activity (the original dates were brought forward due to favourable conditions). The lock-down of aged care facilities was lifted on 16 June, and state borders were opened on 10 July (except for Victoria where there was a serious 'second wave' of infections which would last for many more weeks and result in over 800 deaths—in fact Victoria had 90% of the Australian death toll).

However, there were still serious restrictions on church services, weddings and funerals. At the beginning of June, only 20 people were permitted at services, 20 at

weddings and 100 at funerals. An 'industry plan' was being prepared by the Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue at Griffith University involving 21 groups (nearly half non-Christian) which would allow for up to 100 people to attend services albeit with greater restrictions regarding hygiene, serving of food and the registering of attendees. There was also a density limit (more restricted if singing was to take place), involving division of attendees into separate groups.

This Plan was announced in early June, and implemented in early July, but Baptist Union officials reported that it was not as they had expected it would be—in fact although the churches had been part of the initial discussion, they (including the Baptists) had not been privy to some of the last-minute changes to the published version.

This Plan operated for a while as an optional alternative to the previous provisions. Then it became the sole requirement and, updated in the following months, did ultimately provide more certainty for the new routine of 'Covid-safe' church which had emerged. This involved taking personal details of attendees, density limits, (anti-social) physical distancing, no handshakes, and contactless refreshments. Churches now often displayed unwelcoming signs (and web-page information) advising that attendance required prior on-line or phone registration! Although the Industry Plan allowed for a 'new normal' of physical attendance at services, many churches retained their on-line presence for the sake of those who felt nervous about attending in person and also in the interests of outreach—some churches had reported promising results from their electronic ministry (including Sunday services and also small groups).

All this put a strain on the leadership and active workers. However, a survey of pastors carried out 'during the lull' in June 2020 (by the National Church Life Survey NCLS under commission) reported that they had coped 'reasonably well', a result that was considered 'better than we expected', although some were 'doing it tough', especially those who were already struggling with pre-existing pressures.

Queensland was the first state to open camping again, so QCCC was able to resume partial operation in mid-June (for small groups) and more fully from mid-July, although under tight controls. Malyon College resumed on-site activities also from mid-July. The QB administration soon began at least some physical meetings again in late June and the office building opened again under Covid-safe conditions some time later. The postponed Assembly was held on 30 October 2020 at the Riverlife Baptist Church, Seventeen Mile Rocks, and dealt with several important measures relating to the recent QB Review and the adoption of the delayed budget.

Meanwhile the Futures Task Force had been preparing reports which were submitted during the second half of the year setting out observations and anticipated developments in worship, evangelism, pastoral

leadership and other topics in the new Covid environment.

So after a year or more, the situation improved, apart from regular flare-ups and new more contagious strains of the virus causing reimposition of restrictions—although the disease was at crisis levels in many other parts of the world. By the end of May 2021 there had been a total of just over 1600 cases in Queensland and only 7 deaths.

Early (and persistent) intervention including lock-downs, contact tracing and border closures (sometimes erratic, and leading to the virtual balkanisation of the country) had been credited as the reasons for the favourable situation locally. However, it had come at considerable cost to the economy (especially hospitality and tourism—key sectors for Queensland) and the loss of much personal privacy and freedom—a situation previously completely unthinkable. Sudden imposition of restrictions (and often apparently heartless bans on family reunions) left people nervously fearful of the future, and crippled social recovery.

Despite the severity of these restrictions and curtailments to normal life, there had been little public questioning of the necessity, legitimacy, fairness, effectiveness and broader social impact of these measures although there were reports of such action by leading clerics in the southern states on more than one occasion. There were occasional hints of some behind-the-scenes lobbying of government officials by church and other leaders. Alarmist media reports and unreliable, even toxic, social media activity did little to help. Some political leaders, especially in Queensland, certainly strengthened their electoral positions enormously by adopting a harsh stance on restrictions and border closures under the mantra of ‘keeping Queenslanders safe’.

Baptists, like the rest of the community, had been obliged to cope with the on-going and every-changing restrictions. Churches were conducting regular activities as best they could within the prescribed limits. The Baptist Union Assembly for 2021 was held on schedule on 16 April at the usual location, Mapleton Family Centre. The reports which covered the Covid-year, 2020, revealed a much more hopeful situation than might have been expected, especially in terms of the overall financial situation and the impact on pastors and church life.

However, according to the annual reports, total church membership did drop for the first time in a decade to around 18,000, and the total church community also dropped by 2,000 to 53,000. However, church giving and support of the Baptist Union budget improved by 5-6%. Reports indicated that smaller and medium-sized churches were mostly regaining the numbers of attendees pre-Covid but larger churches were not doing so well.

A year like no other

The year had forced churches to adapt their procedures and caused extensive changes in attitudes, methods and expectations. The Baptist Union in its new structure took a



strong lead—not least because the government regime enforced such an approach—in detailing the application of the regulations and providing support at different levels. This role seemed to be accepted by the churches so that the status of the denominational organisation received a considerable boost. The influence of local pastors was also boosted because they were making the decisions about church life, with little or no reference to the membership.

Rev Dr John Sweetman, who had been the leading figure in the 2017-2019 QB Review, was well placed to offer leadership, being already well known in the denomination and having come out of retirement to take on the role of Interim Director of the QB Movement (DOM) for the year. He devoted considerable time to the emergency and was prolific in issuing documents designed to support churches and pastors, including personal insights and collating those from others. His observations ranged from a discussion of the new ‘pyjama church’ (people preferring to watch church from home over the internet—said to be affecting larger churches more than others) and the concept of ‘digital church’ to the intricacies of working with Zoom and the pressure of constant change. In May 2021, his three significant ‘post-lockdown observations’ were that people were now ‘much more familiar with online technologies’, they were ‘more reluctant to volunteer’ and were ‘more critical of the church’.

According to the chairman of the Board, Rev Peter Sweetman (the brother of Interim DOM), the charter groups and the denominational office were led by competent and dedicated officers who managed the situation well—apparently the newly introduced structure of the denomination and its recently appointed officials proved effective under the sudden unexpected pressure. He also observed that there had been considerable collaboration right across the churches, which tied in with one of the values of the new denominational vision. In the chairman’s view, on-line methods of ministry, although forced on the churches, could turn out to be a powerful new tool for ministry across the vast state of Queensland, although he conceded that regular ‘old-fashioned’ local church commitment might never be the same again.

The flow of documents from the Baptist Union abated somewhat as the crisis lessened. They had mainly focused on the activities of pastors and the successful operation of the churches. There was little if any comment on the many issues raised by the pandemic and its handling—such as the disastrous impact on the economy, mental health, family and social relationships, education, and community needs, not to mention various theological and ethical issues created by this unexpected and unwelcome development.

But overall, the Baptist Union had appeared to respond to Covid much more intentionally than its counterpart a century earlier. However, it is hard to see how the 1919 Flu epidemic did not impact churches just as strongly, but with so few records available from that time, is it difficult to know exactly what took place.

Perhaps they were just more stoic then!



New edition of book on Baptist witness on the Darling Downs

A new edition of 'Baptists in the Never Never' telling the story of the origins and development of Baptist witness on the Darling Downs has been produced. It corrects a few formatting issues and is slightly re-formatted with extra photographs. Copies are available print-on-demand at \$15 posted or in an on-line printing format for the same price.

New publication projects underway

Two new projects studying the history of church planting in Queensland are under way at the present time. Bill Hughes is researching the history of the Queensland Baptist Home Mission, covering more than 80 years of its operation from the 1880s, during which a large number of churches were planted and pastors trained. David Parker is working on an update to the history of Mission of Queensland originally written by Rev M C Williams. This will cover the period from 1997 to the present. Both these projects are long term and in-depth so no publications will be available soon, but together they will cover 140 years of church extension in Queensland.

Photography project



BHQ is considering a new photography project. Photographs are a key part of the work of the Baptist Archives and various projects of BHQ. The Archives holds paper photographs dating from the earliest days of Baptist life in Queensland, with many others from periods since, most of which have been digitised. There are also many colour slides and more recently, large numbers of digital images. Any research project such as those mentioned on this page make extensive use of photographs. The website contains several, including an album showing historical photographs of church buildings from the earliest in the 1850s up to 1955; this is an on-going project. So BHSQ is considering ways in which people interested in photography can put their talents to work to assist. Suggestions are invited.

There is a possibility of a photographic competition with the results put on display. The illustration is portion of a photo in the Archives collection of a Sunday School picnic at Nundah, Queen Victoria's Birthday, 1897.

Missionaries and pastors from the City Tabernacle

On Sunday 20 June 2021, the City Tabernacle Baptist Church launched a book setting out the stories of more than 70 people from that church who have served as missionaries and pastors. The 400-page book was written by David Driver and is available in print from the church and as an e-book on the church website.

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- law in permitting marriage with a deceased wife's sister). With Edith Dignam, he had six children.
- 20 The Victorian Freeman, 1878, p. 96.
- 21 In 1889, Edith married Alfred Hughes Lawrence (1865-1939) who had emigrated to represent a major British maker of electrical goods, founded a successful business here; and after some years returned to his native England, leaving her to bring up their four children.
- 22 One benefit for a pastor's children was reduced fees at church schools. I am grateful for help with tracking the children's schools from the archivists of Wesley College (Margot Vaughan), The Geelong College (Caroline Stok) and Presbyterian Ladies College (Jane Dyer) for details.
- 23 The only reference to the street address in Footscray is in The Leader, Sat. 18 May 1878, p. 27.
- 24 The Victorian Baptist, June 1878, 137. The same issue carries reference to his younger sister's death.
- 25 So, the 1884 Royal Commission in Education. It began in 1873 as the 'Mechanics' Institute School No. 1811'.
- 26 It was noted that he would be attending 'no extras' – just basic classes. The address for fee accounts was 18 Dundee Place, Emerald Hill, with the note 'address to Mrs Slade', which the school archivist has commented was an unusual request – it was usually addressed to the father. Fred worked with Blanchard in the ironmongery, did some house-painting, but sadly became the 'black sheep' of the family.
- 27 George's great friend William Poole at Emerald Hill had just preceded him to Rockhampton.
- 28 The February Queensland Freeman p. 31 reports his arrival in Brisbane on 11th January and Rockhampton the following week. He hadn't yet settled, going to Ipswich for 27 February, but he agrees to Rockhampton's call and arrived by mail steamer on 27th May. In June he is reported as having returned to Melbourne 'to fetch his family' (QF June 1882). My thanks to Dr David Parker for these Queensland references.
- 29 QF Dec. 1884, p. 3, in a letter from the Deacons. The Northern Argus of 25 November describes his farewell but adds nothing about his womenfolk.
- 30 They left on 3rd December. loc. cit.
- 31 This was also generously noted in the north, QF May 1890 p. 2.
- 32 The Southern Baptist, 1 Oct. 1907, p. 238, celebrating 50 years at Fenwick Street.
- 33 From the Probate papers 067/235-685 (1898). As late as 1892, Marianne was living with Edith at Railway Parade, 'Flemington'.
- 34 Marianne Slade née Croggon was my wife Susan née Anderson's great-great-grandmother. I am also indebted to her cousin Professor David Hume, historian of the Lawrence family into which Edith married.