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The Queensland Baptist Forum

The Journal of the Baptist Historical Society of Queensland
(formerly: Baptist Historical Society of Qld Newsletter)

No. 53 Dec 2002

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by David Parker

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Baptist Historical Society of Queensland

Secretary's Report 18th Annual General Meeting, 2 November 2002

2002 has seen continued interest in our history by people in Baptist churches throughout Queensland. Membership of the Society has increased slightly, and we look forward to further interest, as more and more people realise the importance of discovering and remembering our Baptist heritage. There is, however, a need to inspire more of our young people to take an interest in our historical roots, as one way of minimising the pressure to follow the latest fads in church life and worship.

Officers elected at the Annual meeting in November, 2001 were: President: Mr Eric Kopittke; Secretary, Dr Ken Smith; Treasurer: Rev. Vince Chataway; Sales officer: Rosemary Kopittke

There has been continued demand for our publications throughout the year. The revised version of "Baptists in Queensland --- A Guide to their Life and Faith", launched at the Annual Convention in 2000, continues to be one of the most popular, though sales have slackened off from the high point immediately following the launch.

This year has seen two major public meetings: one about the church planting efforts of one of our early churches in Queensland, and the other to launch a biography of William Higlett, Pastor and Secretary of the Union from 1890 to 1902.

On 18 May 60 people gathered for tea at the Centenary Church, followed by a meeting attended by approximately 70. The work of the Jireh Church in establishing a number of churches scattered throughout the Brisbane area was celebrated, with people from many of these churches taking part, and giving us information about the present state of their work. All who heard the story were impressed by the evangelistic zeal shown by the Jireh Church.

On 17th October, during the Annual Convention at the Ashgrove Church, and on 19th October in Toowoomba, a biography of William Higlett, written by the Union Archivist Rev. Dr David Parker was launched. Both these events were well-attended. The publication of the biography was sponsored in part by John Church, grandson of Rev. Higlett, and the New South Wales Baptist Historical Society. Mr Higlett served with distinction as Secretary of both the Queensland and New South Wales Unions, though at different times, as well as being deeply involved in pastoral work. The initial printing of 250 copies of the biography has almost sold out. The Society is very grateful to Rev. Ken Conwell and other people from the Union office for assistance with the launch of the book.

The list of our publications now totals 20. There are still many areas in which a consolidated work would be helpful, and it is hoped that as we approach the 150th anniversary of the opening of the first Baptist church in Queensland, more people will be encouraged to look to our heritage and unearth the many treasures which have, in some cases, passed from living memory. We need to continue to impress on people the importance of keeping accurate records of events, so that in the future people will be able to look back and be encouraged by our successes, as well as giving thought to reasons for any lack of success.

As we move forward into a new year, we look forward to continuing the work of recording and analysing our history, so that, aware of what has gone on in the past, we may take note of our errors, and preserve and remember the good things, to the glory of our Lord.

Ken Smith, Secretary

Society News:

The financial situation of the Society was reported at the annual meeting to be in good shape. To maintain it in that way, it was decided to raise membership rates for 2003 to cover increases in postage and xeroxing to \$10 for individual and \$15 for family, with church/organisation remaining at \$20. The present officers were re-elected for a further term of service. The meetings of the BHSQ for 2003 were set down for 1 March, 14 June and 1 November. At the meeting of 1 March 2003 changes to the BHSQ constitution which were tabled at the 2002 Annual General meeting will be moved for adoption. For a copy of the changes, please contact the secretary.

It was also decided that a new history of Baptists in Queensland should be prepared for the 150th anniversary of the commencement of the work, due to be celebrated in 2005. The new history would include material on the period since the last one (by Rev John White) was done (1977) as well extra more comprehensive coverage on earlier periods

Early Baptist Churches in Queensland No 8

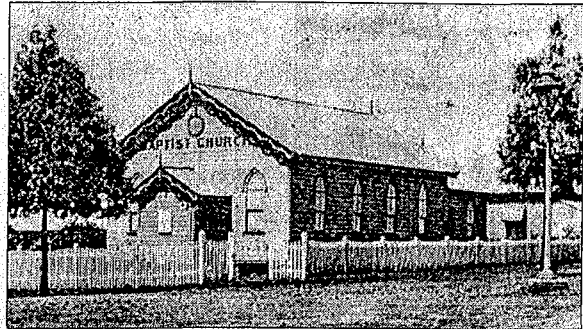
TOOWOOMBA BAPTIST CHURCH

Reproduced from *The Queensland Baptist* Apr 1901 p 49

We continue the reproduction of a series of articles on early Baptist churches in Queensland which appeared in *The Queensland Baptist*. These articles present some interesting details of the churches and buildings. One of the features of the original series was a photograph of the church with each article. Recent pictures of these churches will also be shown where available.

TOOWOOMBA BAPTIST CHURCH

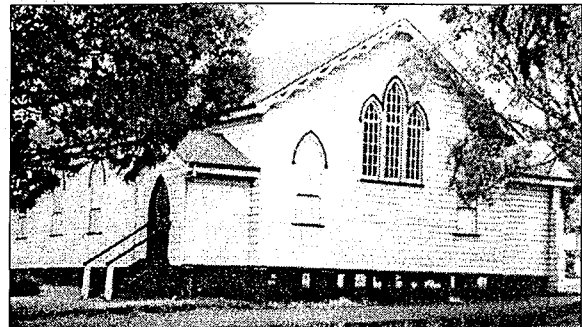
WHEN the Baptists of Toowoomba first met together for worship, and were formed into a church February, 1875, they held their meetings for some months in the Oddfellows' Hall. Later in the same year, Rev. J. Macpherson became pastor, and an allotment was purchased at the corner of Herries Street and Hume Street. On this was a house of three rooms, which was adapted to its new purpose and would accommodate from seventy to eighty persons. In September 1880, the present church was erected at a cost of £350. It measures 40 feet x



Toowoomba Baptist Church

30 feet, and if fully seated would accommodate about 200 persons, or some forty more than its present accommodation. A debt £240 existed on the arrival of Rev. W. Higlett in 1882, which was extinguished in July, 1886. Early in 1888 the original building, which had served for vestries since the erection of the church, was pulled down, and two vestries, each 18 feet x 13 feet, were erected in its place at a cost of £113, of which £70 remained as a debt. About three years afterwards an overdraft was arranged to cover this and meet other expenses. Unfortunately, this soon ran to its limit, and was increased still later for necessary painting of the exterior, so that when Rev. A. G. Weller arrived to take charge in February, 1900, there was an overdraft of £150. We are happy to report that mainly through the exertions of the Ladies' Guild this has now been reduced to £95. The site is a fairly good one, though the progress of the town northwards leaves it rather too far south. The interior of the building badly needs painting, and some ventilation must be placed in the roof, which is too flat. Further seating is also required, so that, much as our friends have accomplished during Mr. Weller's pastorate, they still need the sympathy and help of all supporters of the Home Mission Committee.

(Note: Rev W. Higlett was the author of this article and he also took the two photos—the top one appeared in the original publication, and the lower one is from his album, dated 1905. A new brick structure was opened 9 April 1955, replacing this building which was moved to another location in the city for use as a Lutheran church. The Herries Street site was used for another forty years, until new facilities were opened in Glenvale Road, W. Toowoomba in Nov 1995.



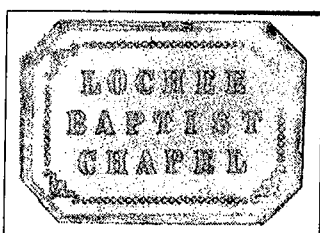
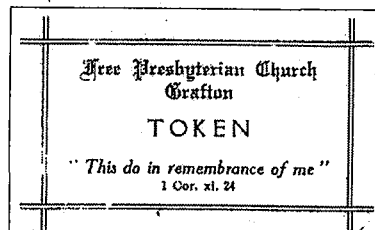
COMMUNION TOKENS OF SOUTH BRISBANE

Melvin Williams

The South Brisbane Baptist church recently celebrated the 130th anniversary of its founding in 1872 with a good display of photographs and historical material. Among the items of interest were booklets of communion tokens for three different years and the accompanying communion attendance book - but more about that later.

The Scottish Heritage

During the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries communion tokens were used mainly in Scottish-related Presbyterian churches, though their history goes back earlier. They were usually made of lead or white metal, occasionally of copper or silver. They were distributed to the congregation by a visit from a church elder beforehand and collected at the communion service. In some larger churches they had the number of the table you were to sit at. Tokens were denied to persons "not judged to be in good standing" with the church at the discretion of the elder who often would

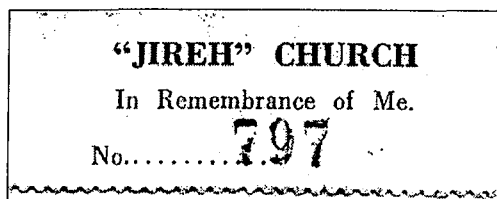


listen to the village gossip. As well as being used in the various Presbyterian churches (Church of Scotland, United Presbyterian, Free Church of Scotland etc.) they were used in churches which retained their allegiance to bishops (Episcopal Church of Scotland). Methodist churches were not strong in Scotland but three Methodist tokens are known. Although Baptists there often adopted the eldership form of local church government rather than the more common congregational pattern, only one church issued a communion token, the LOCHEE BAPTIST CHAPEL in Dundee. None are known for the American or other British colonies.

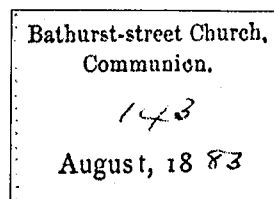
The Australian Experience

So it comes as a surprise to find that in the 19th century two churches in Australia used them briefly, though in card-board-paper form rather than metallic.

The Jireh Baptist in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, was established in 1861 in a strict Calvinist tradition to cater for those who were unhappy with the "open to all" stance of the Wharf Street church. It also reflected the theological and geographical mix of Baptists in "the old country" from Strict and Particular to virtually Congregational. Communion at Jireh was only available to members of that church. Tokens were used for a few years, though just when and for how long is not known.



The other paper token shown was used rather strangely at the Sydney Baptist church known as Bathurst Street church (now Sydney Central in George Street). It is dated 1883 and includes a membership number. Presumably a record of attendees was kept. There is no mention of the practice in AC Prior's history of New South Wales Baptists, *Some Fell on Good Ground* (1966). Their use occurred during the ministry of the Rev WM Clare (1881-1884) who came from Flinders Street church in Adelaide, and retired due to illness in August 1884. Why he introduced them is a mystery. The little known of his background yields no answer. Their use was probably confined to one or two years.



With the coming of the 20th century the use of communion tokens in Presbyterian churches had been largely discarded both in Scotland and in countries such as Australia with the exception of some Free churches. Two Australian examples are shown. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia now embraces the former Free churches. St George's church in Sydney used tokens till 1970.

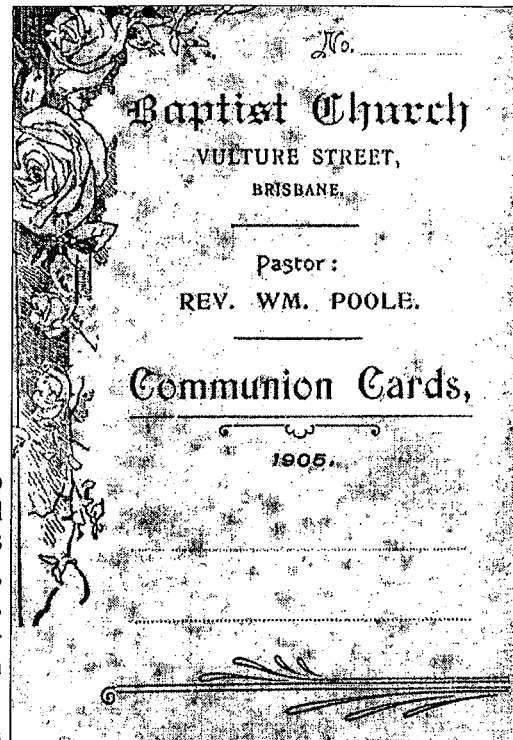
South Brisbane Baptist church

We return to the South Brisbane Baptist church and its use of tokens over several years in the early 20th century. Firstly a brief account of its early history.

In the early 1860's South Brisbane as a town rivalled North Brisbane for a time. Baptists worshipped happily at either the Presbyterian or Congregational churches particularly as a Baptist lay preacher ministered at the Presbyterian church for a prolonged period. Though a Sunday school was started as early as 1857, there was no

1896

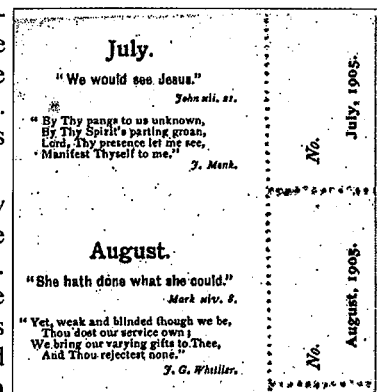
No.	Name.	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
2	Stephens Mr J.B.	/	/	/	/	/
5	Grimes Wm J.	-	-	-	-	-
7	Grimes Geo.	/	/	/	/	/
8	Grimes Mr Wm.	/	/	/	/	/
16	Brookes Mr	-	-	-	-	-
19	Macdonald Mr	-	/	/	/	/
21	Phillips Mr	-	-	-	-	-
23	Phillips Albert	/	/	/	/	/



move to begin a church till 1872. The initial membership included Ebenezer Hooker*, unofficial pastor, Samuel Grimes* (MLA for 24 years), church secretary, T B Stephens* (prominent business man and land owner), church treasurer, and Richard Kingsford*, (business man), deacon. Initial services were held in the Mechanics' Institute but a church building in Vulture Street was opened in 1874.

Over the years the church has been fortunate with its ministry. The Rev Wm Poole ministered for 30 years (1880-1910); Rev Wm Bell MA (1910-1931); Rev P F Lanyon (1931-1936); Rev T C Warriner MA (1937-1940) (both Mr Bell and Mr Warriner became Principals of the Baptist Theological College). Membership peaked at 214 in 1908 and continued around the 100-150 mark. World War II proved a critical time for the church, the membership reaching as low as 46 in 1942. During the ministry of the Rev Norman Mergard (1961-1977) there was a steady rise in membership from 58 in 1961 to 132 in 1969. Reconstruction of the old building began in 1966 and adjoining property was secured in 1969. Today with the changed character of the area and inner suburban status the now small church continues its witness.

Though the church would not be classed among the stricter variety of Baptist churches, the Communion Roll Book shows that attendance at the monthly communion service was considered very important. Members were issued with a number and book of tokens to cover the calendar year. For each month there was a thought to ponder. Members would insert their number, tear off the token which would be collected during the communion service and later entered against their number in the record. Those missing three such services in a row could have their



FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

This do in remembrance of Me.

membership suspended or cancelled altogether. This practice was introduced by the Rev Wm Poole and continued under the Rev Wm Bell till after World War I.

These days an open invitation is given to all Christians but the tokens are a reminder of stricter days.

References:

- South Brisbane Baptist Church 100th Anniversary booklet 1972
- R Dick, *Scottish Communion Token. (non-established churches) 1902*
- AC Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground, 1966*
- JE White, *A Fellowship of Service 1977*
- MC Williams, *Cameos of Baptist Men in 19th Century Queensland, 1995*
- * Cameos of all four of these men are in the above book available from BHSQ

The Higlett Project

by David Parker

In 1984, the Baptist Archives received a letter from the State Library of Queensland, John Oxley library informing us that a substantial gift of documents and photos had been made covering the life and work of a Baptist minister, Rev Wm Higlett. He came from England in 1882 under the appointment of CH Spurgeon to be minister at Toowoomba where he married, had three sons and remained for eight years. He then moved to Albion where he served until 1910; here his first wife died and he remarried. He transferred to Grafton where a daughter was born and then in 1915 began his last pastorate at Haberfield, which lasted until 1929. Throughout most of his ministry he was active in the work of the Baptist Union, especially as secretary of the NSW Union, 1916-1937. He died in 1944.



Rev William Higlett
President, Baptist
Union of Qld 1885

The records came from the Sydney family of Mr Fred Church, who had married Mr Higlett's daughter, Isabel, and his son John, who felt that it would be better for the collection to be in a public library than in private hands. Copies of some of the material were offered to the Baptist Historical Society, but it was part of the terms of the gift that the NSW Society receive copies of all the material.

In reporting this gift in *The Queensland Baptist*, we said, "It will provide a fertile source of information about one of our important pastors and administrators, as well as Baptist life in general. There are not many collections of this kind of material available."

Fourteen years later, John Church contacted the author to enquire whether there was any thought of expanding a brief piece on Mr Higlett that we had just published to a full scale biography. After some consideration, and assurances of support from the family, we decided that there was enough material to make project feasible, and agreed to go ahead with it. So the work, which began in early 1999, has taken more than three years to finalise. A 188 page book, 'A True Pastor' was launched in October 2002 at the Queensland Baptist Convention and at Toowoomba Church, and

the next month in Sydney.

The Higlett collection itself was substantial – reflecting the interests and skills of Mr Higlett and his care in collecting and preserving records. First there were scrapbooks containing about 500 cuttings from local and religious newspapers commencing from his arrival in Queensland up until his senior years. Since Mr Higlett made extensive use of the press for announcements, reports and articles, this is a particularly valuable collection. Another part of this collection is correspondence and press clippings about his appointment to Toowoomba and letters between himself, Spurgeon and the church; one letter is from Spurgeon's widow responding to expressions of sympathy at the time of the great preacher's death.



Emily Figgis and Alice Higlett,
(Emptage sisters)

Then there were diaries of Mr Higlett's trip to Australia and of a visit back to England in 1902, not only recording his activities but also describing and commenting on many aspects of what he saw both in the churches and the society at large. A third extremely valuable part of the collection was a pastoral diary with daily entries from 1910 until a few days before his death in 1944. Presumably he kept a diary from the beginning but the earlier parts are missing. The diary records his visits,



Window of Royal Agricultural Hall,
Islington,
now Business Design Centre

meetings, preaching and many personal and family activities, and has sections at the end of each month and year giving total numbers of sermons preached, visits made, miles travelled and often an evaluation of his performance and prospects.

Another part of this collection is the set of seven photograph albums, with more than 1000 pictures taken from 1904 to 1941. Mr Higlett was a keen and skilful photographer and the range and quality of work is amazing, covering not only family and church life but scenery, industry and community life. Most of the pictures are identified. Finally, there are a series of theological papers presented by Mr Higlett at various meetings and his lecture notes on

preaching which he used in both Queensland and NSW where he was an active supporter of the colleges.

With these resources, it was comparatively easy to begin working on the biography. Access was also readily obtained to the records of the four churches where he served; eventually all the vital material was found to be extant. This was supported by material on denominational matters found in the Baptist Archives in the two states. All this basic material was supplemented by information about the districts in which he served obtained from the local community libraries and historical societies.



Lily Higlett
(nee Low)

Family sources were also important. As well as additional material being obtained from the Church family, descendants of the two surviving sons, Ernest and Arthur, provided photographs and information that proved invaluable in compiling the story. More distant family members also provided assistance. There were some families of second cousins on the Higlett side who came to Australia in the 19th century and others more recently who, when contacted, were able to assist.

One small but significant lead in a Haberfield church report to *The Australian Baptist* unlocked information about Mrs Alice Higlett's sister, Emily, and her family. The report simply said that Pte. Jack Figgis, 'a nephew of Pastor W. Higlett' who had been wounded in Gallipoli, was a visitor to the church one evening. Following through on the leads provided by this small piece of news revealed a long standing connection in both Brisbane and Sydney with the Figgis family who were particularly kind to the Higletts in their senior years. (It was also discovered that the Figgis boys played in the South Brisbane Baptist Church Football Club!) Contact was finally established

with current members of the Figgis family in both Australia and England, with the result that extensive details are now accessible.

However, the most useful assistance from a family member came early in the project when Anne and Gordon Higlett of Warwick, UK, made email contact seeking information and offering help. Gordon Higlett is descended from a brother of William's grandfather. He and his wife Anne had set out to compile as complete a Higlett family tree as possible and already had collected a great deal of information. A personal visit to UK in mid-1999 enabled us to work together closely for the remainder of the project, with extremely gratifying results.

This initial visit took place as part of a longer visit to UK during which other aspects of the Higlett story were researched. Visits were made to the sites of his childhood and youth in London and Royal Tunbridge Wells. Of particular interest was the discovery of the old Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington, now the Business Design Centre, where he heard D L Moody preach, leading to his conversion. The location of the Baptist church which he soon joined was also identified, and valuable material was found at Spurgeon's College where he trained for the ministry. His first (student) pastorate was at Cheam, and once again, it was possible to visit the old church (now a second hand shop) and gain local information from the historical library. There were useful materials at the Birmingham University on the YMCA in which William served before entering college, gaining valuable practical experience and training in Christian work such as preaching, evangelism, visitation, tract distribution and welfare work.

Most of the material came together easily – in fact, there were so many apparently important and interesting aspects to his life and ministry that the project was in danger of expanding to unmanageable proportions. His younger life was touched by such great movements as the Moody missions to UK, Spurgeon's ministry and the YMCA while in his active ministry he fostered not only evangelism, preaching, pastoral work and denominational involvement in two states, but he took active role in the temperance movement and was always keen to involve himself in public and community life.



Jack Figgis South
Brisbane Baptist
Football Club
photo 1914

In particular, he produced interesting musicals and lectures using his creative powers and his camera to provide the lantern slides which were often part of the program. Sometimes he would give educational talks involving scientific experiments to interest children and in the hope that parents would take up some of the ideas to occupy their children, thus helping to offset the anti-social behaviour that seemed to be problem at various times. A keen observer of all aspects of life, he wrote up vivid descriptions of his travels to many parts of the country in the form of feature articles for newspapers, and presented them as lectures. We have followed some of these trips, especially in northern NSW, using his diaries and photographs as a guide.

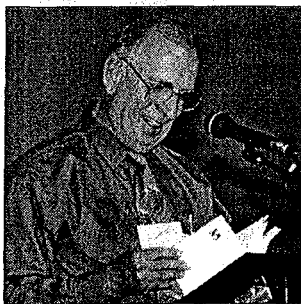
His travel diaries are full of interesting details, including descriptions of ship-board life, the tube system in London, even a discussion on underground 'conveniences' (a 'penny in the slot' variety) and 'lavatories where you can get a wash and brush up for about 1 1/2d or 2d', and the coronation of Edward VII (or at least preparations for it – for it had to be put off until after the Higlett's left London due to royal illness!) and many other

aspects of life. His writings were also devotional and theological; as might be expected from his office and commercial training, he took a keen interest in figures and commented regularly in the denominational papers on church membership and census trends as the figures became available.

A natural expansion of this aspect of his meticulous care of records was his historical writing – he wrote illustrated features on churches and pastors (which we have reproduced in *Forum* – see article in this issue on Mr Higlett's Toowoomba church). Major works included the editing of the jubilee history of Baptists in Queensland (1905) and editing of a history of Australian Baptists for the formation of the Baptist Union of Australia (1926). He also collected extensive material for a NSW history, and wrote an article on Baptists for a major encyclopaedia.

As easy as the task was in some respects, sometimes interesting information was difficult, even impossible, to find. The Figgis family connection mentioned above is a case in point. Extensive details were at length discovered about this family – including a donation from Mr C. Figgis of a text painted on the wall of the Toowoomba church, but so far it has been impossible to find out when or how Alice Higlett's sister, Emily (nee Emptage) came to Queensland or the identity of a James Emptage who is later mentioned as visiting the Higlett's in Sydney.

The travels of Emily and her sister are interesting because so far it appears they both travelled from UK to Australia in the 1880s alone. However, there may be more to the story if the Thomas and William Deacon story that we researched a few years ago is any guide. The traditional information was that the elderly widower, Rev. Thomas Deacon travelled by himself to Brisbane so he could be with his sickly son, William who had come earlier. However, investigation showed that he (and William before him) had travelled with several family members, thereby casting a rather different and far more interesting light on the story.



Dr Ifor Thomas, President
Baptist Union of Qld
launching the Higlett book,
17 Oct 2002

Another tantalising item relates to William's employment in London. He mentioned several times, rather proudly, that he spent eight years after he left school working in a 'commercial' office, where he doubtless learned and honed the administrative skills that would be put to good use later. In a tribute to him after this death, one anonymous Queensland writer said,

'We have worshipped in the church where he worshipped as a youth, passed daily by the business house in London where he was employed, and, when we set our feet on this great land, he was one of the first to give us welcome.'

William himself identified the church, Trinity John Street (at Edgeware Road, London), but there is no further clue that would identify the business. One more small piece of information goes a little way, but in the end it is no use.

In a sermon in 1911 commissioning a Miss Cousin as a missionary to India, he uses an illustration from his 'commercial' experience. He reminded her that she would find times when the spiritual environment in which she would be working would dull her zeal; in such times she would need to find refreshment by looking again at the Lord Jesus 'and in the vision of him your fellowship will be maintained and your teaching kept true.'

The illustration he used came from the product which his firm handled, known as Turkey Reds, a kind of textile which was well known at the time for its brilliant and long lasting red dye. He pointed out that as the workers looked on the red material they would begin to lose the ability to see clearly. Then they would look at the green paper in which the product was always wrapped to restore clarity. William said that he worked 'in the London office of a Lancashire firm'. Research shows that Turkey Red was originally produced exclusively in Scotland but later Lancashire also gained some of the trade. There are web sites devoted to the history of this product and they list a number of firms that operated both in Lancashire and London, but there is no way of finding out which one was William's employer.

But these are only minor points in a well documented life that is full of interest and inspiration. It has been a satisfying project, extending over four years (interrupted for some periods for personal reasons) revealing a man who was aptly described as 'a faithful minister, a true pastor, a wise administrator', and a man of broad mind, kindly in judgment, generous in spirit, constant in faith.



Valerie (great-granddaughter), John
(grandson) and Leanne (g-great-
granddaughter with baby at launch of
Higlett book in Toowoomba,
19 Oct 2002