

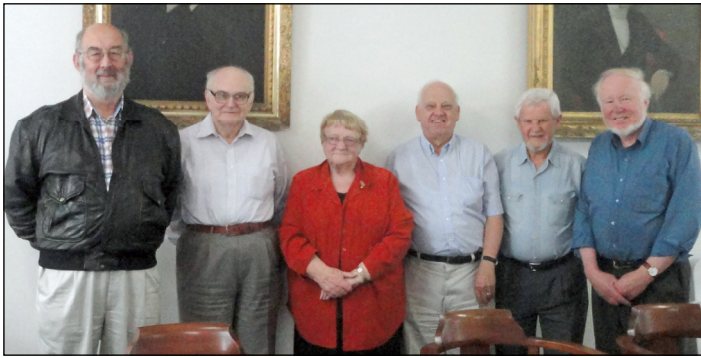


The Queensland Baptist Forum

The Journal of the Baptist Heritage Queensland

No. 86 December 2013

Historic Meeting of Archivists



Archivists from each of the Australian states met for the first time in November 2013. The two day meeting took place in Melbourne as part of the regular meeting of national Baptist leaders. The photo shows those present: Dr John Sampson (Vic), Dr John Stanhope (NSW), Miss Rosalind Gooden (SA and Global Interaction), Dr David Parker (Qld), Dr Richard Moore (WA) and Laurie Rowston (Tas). A wide range of topics was discussed, information shared, and connections between

state Archives strengthened. A full report will be issued soon, together with recommendations for further enhancement and expansion of Archives' activities.

The Australian Baptist—now becoming available in digital form

The national denominational newspaper, the *Australian Baptist* (published 1913-1991) is becoming available in digital form, thanks to cooperation between the state Archives, Historical Societies and others. There are not many copies of the full run of the paper in hard copy anywhere in Australia and certainly not in Queensland. So this digital project will be a great help here, especially as the *Qld Baptist* was not published 1913-1923 and issues are completely missing for 1931-1951! The Digital AB is available at the Archives.

'From Five Barley Loaves' - Now Published

After many years of work, the official history of Global Interaction has been published, entitled, *From Five Barley Loaves: Australian Baptists in Global Mission 1864-2010*, edited by Tony Cupit, Ros Gooden and Ken Manley. The book is a comprehensive account of the pioneering global mission work of Australian Baptists in the Indian sub-continent and subsequent mission work across Asia, Africa, Central America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East as well as to and by our own Indigenous people. The contributors are mostly former Global Interaction staff. Order online at mosaicresources.com.au

2014 Meeting Dates — 22 Feb; to be arranged; 8 Nov (AGM) 2pm @ Archives!

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Membership (2013) Individual \$10 p.a. Family \$15 p.a. Corporate \$20 p.a. <i>Qld Baptist Forum</i> 3 issues p.a. Free to Members Others \$2 each posted President: Mr Eric W. Kopittke 98 Yallambee Rd., Jindalee 4074 Phone 3376 4339 kopittke@tpg.com.au Secretary: Dr Ken G. Smith, 2301/15 Cansdale Street, Yeronga, Qld 4104 Phone 3892 6337 tizzardsmith@hotmail.com http://parker.org.au/bhsq.htm BWA Baptist Heritage & Identity Commission www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org	Qld Baptist Forum No 86 Dec 2013 Historic meeting of Australian Archivists; AB goes Digital; Global Interaction p 1 Baptists in the Golden West: Rockville Baptist Church by David Parker p 2 Baptists in the Golden West: Baptists dream of the South West! (Part I) by David Parker p 6 BHQ—29th Annual Report 2013 p 8

Baptists in the Golden West

Rockville Baptist Church

By David Parker

This article is an initial draft for the BHQ project documenting the story of Baptists in south-west Queensland. It will be subject to revision before final publication. Thanks is expressed to the people of the church for their assistance and acknowledgement is made of previously existing historical documents. The church has recently been renamed (see more below) but the original familiar name is provisionally used in the title. Chapters on other churches in the region will be published when completed. Assistance is invited in this project.

Baptists in Toowoomba

Baptist witness in Toowoomba began with a flourish in 1875 when the church was formed and regular services began. By then, the town was already more than 20 years old, the population was around 3600 and the other main denominations were active. There was no Baptist Union yet but there eight other Baptist churches in the colony, mainly in and around Brisbane, although there was one as far north as Rockhampton.

The new Toowoomba church made good progress, quickly expanding its membership and procuring a building. However, there were periods of difficulty - and even severe decline - as a result of both outward pressures and internal problems before it was secularly established as a thriving and influential church by the early years of the 20th century.

Outreach to country areas nearby was part of the pattern from almost the beginning with outstations and preaching places being commenced in places like Murphy's Creek and the Gowrie Creek district. Highfields was another centre, and was one of the most successful of the outstations, although this work fluctuated - sometimes as an independent church and at other times, as an outstation of Toowoomba. It was not until the 1970s that the work there was revived, and a decade later, became an independent church.

Expansion within the town area of Toowoomba was also part of the mission of the church in its early days. Services were held for a few years in the 1880s at Newtown in the expanding west. However it was not until the late 1930s before there was sufficient growth to consider further expansion to the north (at Rockville), and another decade after that in the south.

Initial work at Rockville

On the north side, the work began in the form of a Sunday School sponsored by the Toowoomba church under the leadership of its pastor, Rev Frank Varnes (1936-43). However, the initiative was taken by a group of young men, all members of the Christian Endeavour Society who, following an idea they had heard of from the Warwick Baptist Church, formed themselves in to 'The Fisherman's Club'.

During the later months of 1939 they began planning and then started canvassing for children to attend the Sunday School on the north edges of the town. However, when they found that some were already attending Sunday schools in the town, they decided to extend their efforts to the outer edges of the district.



Rockville Hall—1949

They settled on the Rockville area, and commenced a Sunday School on 4 Feb 1941 in a rented building at the back of what was known as Ford's Garage, North Street. Some of the people involved in this activity were Messrs D Finden, K. Barry and L. and R. Hohl. The owner of the building they used was connected with the Nundah Baptist Church. There were 8 children on the first Sunday, but 21 the next. Generous donations by supporters of the work paid the rent.

The first teachers were Mrs J. Inwood and Miss G. Ingram, along with Keith Barry, who was secretary; he was later replaced by Mrs L. Hohl. Mr H. Beaumont who had recently moved to Toowoomba from Brisbane was appointed Superintendent from 1 April 1942. Sunday School teachers often needed transport because there was no suitable bus service. They were assisted by Mr and Mrs Inwood and Mr R. Dunster who offered the use of their cars.

Further growth continued, and in January 1942, a piece of land opposite the Rockville State School was donated by Miss Thorne (who remained anonymous at the time). Mr and Mrs George Dunster, of the Toowoomba church, provided £300 for the erection of a building which was opened by the secretary of the Baptist Union, Rev Ralph Sayce, on 4 Jan 1942 before a crowd of 150 people. Numerous donors provided fittings such as the organ, a pulpit Bible and the notice board.

Services were conducted three times a month in the new building by Rev Frank Varnes. After his departure from Toowoomba, Sunday School times were changed to the afternoon which not only resulted in increased attendance but also built up the evening service, especially when it was preceded by a fellowship tea. With steady growth, the building proved to be too small, so in 1945, it was extended by 4 metres at a cost of £236.

Then it was decided that steps should be taken to

develop the work to the level of a church, rather than just a Sunday School. An organising committee was formed and plans set out to renovate the building. Although there were some difficulties in obtaining supplies, funding raising was successful and the porch was enlarged, the hall was completely repainted, new furniture made and lights installed.

These action transformed the hall into an attractive church suitable for worship services, but it also meant that there was now no place for informal activities such as children's and youth work.



Moving the Hall - 1950

Expansion and Consolidation

So the next step was to plan for a hall. Mr E. Pfeiffer made land available at the present location of 11 Holberton Street, with space for future expansion. The new hall was constructed, and opened on 10 December, 1949 by Mr C. G. Sweetman, President of the Baptist Union of Queensland. A year later, the original building was moved to its new position alongside the hall. These two buildings gave the fellowship a suitable base for its witness and service to the community.

Over the next few years, the buildings proved their worth and the work developed to the point where it became strong enough to consider recognition as a church in its own right. Pastor Alan Brady, appointed by the Home Mission as an assistant to Rev A J M Howard at the central Toowoomba church, took the responsibility for pastoral leadership. He found leading the fellowship in its development was a very satisfying ministry.

It was decided at a special meeting on 1 July 1955 to request the formation of the Rockville Baptist Church. A week later, the proposal was put to the Toowoomba church meeting, and a special meeting on 13 July decided in favour of this move. The decision was then sent to the Baptist Union which approved the action. In November, they were advised that their first Home Mission pastor as a separate church would be T. M. Graham.

The official constitution of the church took place on 9 Dec 1955 at a service led by Rev. W. K. Holmans, President of the Baptist Union. All but 4 of the 22 foundation members were present for the occasion, most of whom had transferred from the Toowoomba church. There were visitors from the Gatton, Tent Hill and Toowoomba churches present as well. Greetings were received from former pastors and others with a close interest in the work. The President

delivered an encouraging address on six features of 'The Model Church'.

Continued growth with the Home Mission

One of first needs after becoming a Home Mission church was to make better arrangements for the accommodation of the pastor. Work soon began with discussions being held with a builder, Mr Harold Scholl. A plan for a house next door to the church, costing about £2000 was approved by the Home Mission (HM). A loan of £500 from the Baptist Union was obtained and on 13 Oct 1956 work began. An official stump capping ceremony was held on 3 Nov 1956, led by Mr C P Morgan, President of the Baptist Union and attended by civic officials and interested local people.

Progress was quick, and the opening and dedication took place on 30 March 1957, with Rev F J C Stone, Secretary of Baptist Union of Qld officiating. The builder contributed a great deal to the project by not charging for some of his services and time; church volunteers and other tradesmen also helped to keep the cost down to a little over £2300, but there was a debt of over £1000.

After its constitution in 1955, the church came under the direction of the Home Mission, which appointed its pastors who were usually inexperienced and were also required to spend time working on their study course with the Queensland Baptist College. They were usually appointed for 2 or 3 years before being moved elsewhere—or even sooner.

Although there were limitations to this kind of pastoral arrangement, the pastors and churches adapted quickly and good work was done by the pastors, resulting in blessing in the life of the church. There were six pastors during this Home Mission period, during which there was steady progress, and a flow of baptisms after the first one took place 1959; there were additions to the membership although transfers out meant that there was little net increase.

Sunday school work was always a priority, with teachers regularly undergoing training programs and students often appearing in the top places of the annual Sunday School Examinations; plans were laid for the introduction of an All Age Sunday School. Boys' and Girls' Brigades were introduced in 1966. There were Christian Endeavour groups and the church participated strongly in the annual youth exchange and other occasional efforts such as outings, fund raising walks and innovative efforts such as a drama group. Music was a key feature of the church's life, and it often presented musical programs both locally and at other churches, sometimes in cooperation with other choirs and talented performers.

The church became involved in the many evangelistic crusades such as the Billy Graham Campaign, the Missouri Australia Mission, the Pan Australian Crusade and Re-Entry. The Ladies fellowship continued its strong support of prayer, missions, and practical work around the church.

There was great joy in 1960 when Brian Brieser who had come up through the Sunday School and youth group was accepted as student for the ministry

and became a Home Mission pastor. Many years later Phil Greenbury also entered the Baptist ministry.

There had been an active women's work from April 1949 which became a branch of the Queensland Baptist Women's Union. A wide variety of ladies' meetings and other ministries took place, including support for missions, social activities and prayer. From 1962, work began amongst men with regular teas and the formation of a Men's Society.

One interesting activity of the church which received some attention in the local paper was a celebration of Arbor Day in April 1959. There was a fete with a stalls, a musical program, and a movie film featuring gardens of France followed by the planting



Building works -1986

of trees and shrubs; the Mayor of Toowoomba planted the first. The church showed its interest in wider work in the state and region by its active support of the Downs and Lockyer Association, especially in camp site at Prince Henry Drive, Toowoomba which began in 1954. The church also assisted with moves to develop a witness in Roma and the mid-west in the 1960s when this became a key feature of Baptist life in the area. Support by prayer and in practical ways of overseas missionary work was also high on the agenda.

Outstations

Closer to home, in 1958, the church was requested to take over responsibility for an outreach in the North Drayton district consisting of a Sunday School and services. The central church had begun this but now wanted to concentrate its attention on a new work in Eastern Heights. A 50 seat wooden hall had been erected in Alderley Street in 1958 as the base. Rockville reluctantly agreed to this arrangement which, being some distance from its site, had to be seen as an outreach to a new area. A packed service at North Drayton, featuring the HM Superintendent and choirs from both churches, marked the changeover.

For several years, considerable effort was put into this venture, but with no lasting success. Finally after 5 years of sacrificial effort, it was handed back to Central. The hall was moved to the South Toowoomba church in 1969 and used to 1985 when it was sold to a local farmer.

The outreach to Eastern Heights was not a success either and eventually the building erected there was also moved to South Toowoomba, and in 1985 it was relocated to Highfields

This left 3 churches to operate in the Toowoomba urban area (with Highfields as a fourth on the north-

ern outskirts) for many years, although Central relocated to the west in 1995 and in 2010 another church began operating using hired premises; by this time, there was also some non-Union Baptist work in the city. There were occasional joint activities such as a progressive dinner and combined service, but the churches mostly focused on ministries in their own areas.

A church in its own right

As the work expanded at Holberton Street during this period, space for the various activities became a problem so on 27 Feb 1965 an old Army hut from Carbarlah was opened as the Education Building (No 2 Hall). At the end of 1966, a new much larger porch was added and a toilet block was erected.

By 1970, Rockville church had grown to the point where it no longer needed the support of the Home Mission. So the *Queensland Baptist* (Aug 1970) carried this joyous notice:

'Oh, sing unto the Lord a New Song, for He hath done marvellous things!' These words from Psm. 98 struck a chord in every heart in the fellowship at Rockville, when, as from July 1, 1970 we became an autonomous church.

It had taken 39 years of dedicated work to reach this important milestone. The report went on to say:

We praise God for the many faithful pastors who have served the church over the years, each adding their contribution to the growth in grace of the fellowship. Today the Church, the hall, the Sunday School buildings, together with the Manse, stand in a picturesque setting — a monument to the loving-kindness of God and to those who have been willing to make themselves available to Him.

The church then had the privilege of calling its own pastor. A M Burgess, who was the current HM appointee was called to continue with the church as it made the change. He remained at the church until the beginning of 1972.

At about the same time, the church also recognised enthusiastically the great contribution Mr Horace Beaumont and made him a Life Deacon. They said,

Our brother has served the Church at Rockville with a faithful devotion since the beginning of the work, which he was mainly instrumental in founding.

Over the years there were other long serving members whose contributions and faithfulness were much appreciated, some of whom were honoured in this or other ways.

Rockville in its hey-day – a new church

Membership climbed steadily and within a decade, when it was reported at around 70, there was need to consider the buildings once again. In early 1985, a feasibility study for developing the site was drawn up by Barry Whisson, Director of Downs Designed Environments Pty Ltd. It suggested that for the first stage, the existing hall could be moved to the rear of the block, with a new hall being erected as stage two; the existing church would be sold for removal. There was the possibility of new church being erected at the front of the block at some later date as a third stage.

Early in 1986, plans for the new hall were drawn up. The education block was due for removal as well. Funding was arranged through the cooperative Baptist Inter Church Aid scheme, through which a group of churches pooled their resources and also made specific commitments for payments in advance of their need for funds.

Work began on the project in July 1986 and was finished in mid-September. The cost of the work on the education block amounted to about \$11,000 while the erection of the new hall was \$53,000, which together with other works brought the total to almost \$70,000. The old church was sold for \$1000.

Rockville in decline

Although the church sought to maintain its activities as strongly as possible, young people often moved away for work, which made the church less attractive for families. There were occasional tensions within the church, particularly in the 1990s, which led to a decline in numbers from the peak reported membership of 72 in the early 1980s. Ageing of the population and membership was also a factor, with many of stalwarts becoming less active, moving away, or dying after a lifetime of faithful service.

The remaining members made necessary adjustments. The Ladies Fellowship closed in 2008 after almost 50 years of service, but not before due honour was paid to ladies who had attended over the years in the form a crocheted tablecloth featuring the date of commencement and the names of the 106 ladies who

had been members. In its place, a mixed daytime Bible study group was established.

One particular effective ministry was a monthly jumble sale begun in May 1997 by Linda Hillberg which raised funds for missions and other causes, and made useful goods available at reasonable prices for those who are in need. This, together with occasional community events such as a 'fun day' showed that there were still opportunities for witness and service.

However, the declining membership of the church also meant that the church was unable to support a full time pastor. Rev Phil West and Rev Noel Nicholls have helped the church during this time, and various lay and visiting preachers have assisted under the guidance of the Leadership Team. Mrs Margaret Kebble (former pastor from NZ) was appointed as Pastoral Care Assistant for a few hours per week from 2012. The church changed its name to Toowoomba Northside Church in September 2007.

Although the church's membership has dropped below 20, it has made a faithful witness in the area but now, more than 70 years on from its original establishment as a flourishing Sunday School, it is looking for fresh vision and power to continue its ministry.



Toowoomba North Baptist Church 2013

***Note:** As this initial version of the story goes to print, an announcement has been made that the Warwick Baptist Church, supported by Toowoomba Community Baptist Church, is establishing a new church plant based at the Rockville State School, 3 Holberton St, Toowoomba, less than 300 metres away and opposite the original site of the Rockville Church. The new church is to be called 'Church on the Rock.'*

(Continued from page 8)

It was necessary during the year to change the URL for our website which is kindly hosted for us by Dr David Parker. It is hoped that in due time we might have our own website, but in the meantime, to contact us people might like to bookmark <http://parker.org.au/bhsq.htm> (sorry, no Facebook page yet!).

We are living in an age where much information is held, and communicated, in electronic form. We have made a start in this area, and have scanned many printed documents and periodicals relating to Baptist history, and acquired others from various other historical archives. However many minute books and other documents are only available in hand-written form, and we are considering the best way in which these, and photos, could be stored in electronic form.

There has been little change in the membership of the Society, but we look forward to further interest. Officers elected at the Annual meeting in November, 2012 were: President: Mr Eric Kopittke; Secretary/Treasurer: Dr Ken Smith; Publications Officer: Mrs Rosemary Kopittke.

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

Note: The Archivist's Annual Report is available on request.

Baptists in the Golden West

Baptists Dream of the South West! (Part I)

This article is an initial draft for the BHQ project documenting the story of Baptists in south-west Queensland. It is the first part of the chapter and will be subject to revision before final publication. Acknowledgement is made of various documents and materials used in preparing the account. Chapters on other churches in the region will be published when completed. Assistance is invited in this project.

Baptist hopes about the West

A Baptist church existed in Roma, 480 kms by road from Brisbane, from 1965 to 1994 and there was a church at Charleville in the late 1980s. However, today the most westerly Baptist church in the Darling Downs area of Queensland is located in Chinchilla. This means that organised witness has only pushed on about 120 kms in a westerly direction (but longer by road) since William Higlett wrote about the absence of Christian witness in the 'never never land' area 130 years ago: 'Westward [from Toowoomba], for over 2,000 miles extends the vast "never, never" country, without any Baptist church, and but few ministers of any denomination.' (David Parker, *A True Pastor*, page 34)

This region, stretching more than 1000 kms from east to west and over 300 kms north-south is more than 350,000 sq kms in area (half as big again as the state of Victoria and nearly the size of Germany). It was originally explored by Major Thomas Mitchell and Edmund Kennedy in the 1840s. Twenty years and more later, settlements were established in places such as Charleville, Mitchell, Cunnamulla and St George.

Although there has been only limited Baptist witness in this vast area of Queensland, it has been in the mind of Baptists for a long time. Roma was mentioned more than once when the Home Mission was being established in the early 1880s. Along with other remote areas in the colony, it was listed as one of the places where Baptists ought to have a church. (*Queensland Freeman* (QF), April 1883)

The population of the colony was then only around 300,000, and about 5,500 people named themselves as Baptist in the Census. The only churches outside the Brisbane area were at Ipswich, Rockhampton and Toowoomba (which was 350 kms to the east). A few years later, Rev William Whale declared that it was not much use claiming some virtue for evangelising in foreign countries 'if we take no care for those near our doors' – with Roma once again included by name. (QF, May 1887)

There were isolated Baptists in the area, as there were in many places – one of them being Mr James Saunders, JP, a chemist, who at least maintained contact with Baptist life by subscribing regularly to the *Queensland Freeman*; as local newspapers indicate, he was a prominent citizen who often sat on the bench of the local court, and was well known as the leader of the local Band of Hope.

However, as William Higlett, the inveterate traveller and devoted pastor, found to his concern when he visited Roma in 1888, there was no place for Baptists to worship. Interestingly, Rev. William Whale, pastor of Wharf Street church, had found the same in

Townsville when he had visited there. However, Higlett was at least able to serve the people of Roma in a modest way by baptising four of them when they travelled to his church in Toowoomba (QF, Aug 1888). The memory lingered on, because in 1901 Higlett, who was by then living in Sydney, reported with happiness that he had met some of his old friends from Roma in the southern capital.

Some newspaper reports from the early 1890s suggested that there were Baptist services and a Sunday School in the town. However, as there is no other record of Baptist activity then, it is likely that there was confusion with the Church of Christ which was active there at the time.

The call for Baptists to meet the spiritual needs of the remote areas of the state continued in 1899 with one of the speakers at the Assembly standing before the audience and pointing out critical areas on a large map. Then again in 1903, William Whale as president called for a detailed survey of the entire state to determine the exact needs and opportunities. He said there was:

[N]o church from Toowoomba to the border, or on to Armidale, in New South Wales; the same from Toowoomba to Roma, and out that way; from Rockhampton to Clermont and Longreach; from Charters Towers to Winton; from Cairns to Chillagoe.

Then in what was a very modern approach, he went on to say,

Our knowledge of the country is very limited ... Let us have a grasp of the geography, the numerical, social, and religious conditions of the State, so as to talk intelligently, and to plan with prospects of development, and with least cost of life and money, and best hope of doing real good work.

He added in a damning indictment,

The Baptists have been in Queensland for close on fifty years, and we have no grasp of the country as a field for service in the Kingdom of God. (QB 2/1903)

Rev T J Malyon, soon to be the first principal of the Baptist College, made a simple, plain appeal in his presidential year, 1903, by calling for 'AT LEAST TEN NEW CHURCHES IN QUEENSLAND this year'. He said,

Baptists are everywhere. In large centres like Bundaberg, Warwick, Roma, to say nothing of smaller places which are daily, increasing in magnitude and importance, they are actually anticipating action on the part of our Association.

Some action at last

They might have been hopeful of action, but distance, low population, shortage of personnel and other pressing priorities meant that the area remained neglected for many more decades still. The first signs of change appeared with Rev J Wilbur Fletcher's ambitious plan to cover the entire state in the Baptist Gospel Wagon. (1948 Annual Report) Following up on brief contact by his predecessor in this ministry, Rev Max Howard, Fletcher included the area in his itinerary in 1951.

He reported that his trek began at Inglewood and Goondiwindi (which would not see a settled Baptist work for another 50 years) and then moved westward along the border before turning north to Thallon and on to St George where he met up with a Baptist school teacher. Dirranbandi was next—it had three church buildings but no resident minister; about 25 people responded to his open air ministry (there were no halls for meetings!) by receiving Gospels and other literature. Cunnamulla, a shearers' town and therefore hostile to the message, was the next port of call, but many people there also received the gospel story.

The Gospel Wagon then made its way to Quilpie and to Charleville where there was a full program of outreach on the Sunday - open air meetings, children's ministry, hospital visitation and sharing with the Salvation Army in the evening service. It was an easterly track from there via Morven to Mitchell where there was another open-air meeting and a lapsed Baptist (Fletcher called him a 'back slider') received encouragement to return to his faith. The weather was cold and the road to Roma claimed another tyre on the van, but finally Dalby was in view. (*Queensland Baptist* (QB), August 1951, p 10-11)

Another interesting but isolated sign was the application for the Baptist ministry submitted by a young accountant recently moved to Dalby but who had worked in Roma from 1945-1949; he was C Louis Miller, a resident partner with a prominent local firm, who was active in local church work as a lay preacher and youth leader. He began his training in 1951 and went on to become a leading minister, serving in churches in different parts of the state, as the first full time Director of Community Services (now Carinity) (1970-86) and as President of the Baptist Union (1985-86).

In 1954, HM Superintendent, Rev A H Brooks, surveyed areas to the west of Dalby making good contacts at Dulacca, Roma, Charleville and Cunnamulla. Meetings were held in several homes. He found that the people he met longed for Christian fellowship and he was concerned to try to meet their needs, especially those of the women and children. (QB July 1954)

However, nothing much could be done except to enlist as many as possible in the Isolated Baptists ministry, led at the time by Mr R O Lockhart, which wrote letters and sent copies of the *Queensland Baptist* magazine to people living in remote areas where there was no Baptist church. One token of encouragement was an unsolicited gift from an elderly Baptist widow who said she was passing on her one pound donation to help work in the outback. She said she wanted to try to balance the emphasis that usually fell on the 'fringe' in

the eastern part of the state. It was the prayer of this pensioner that 'The Lord will surely send men and women into our vast state.' (QB 4/56)

That prayer was soon to be answered. By the late 1950s, the Baptist Home Mission was growing more confident and was at last able to contemplate the possibility of reaching some of the remote areas that had been on the agenda for such a long time. There was



HM Superintendent Rev Vic Bowring in the Roma Mid-West van

growing interest in places such as Mount Isa, Longreach and North Queensland as the mineral and pastoral wealth of these areas became more well known. It was even hoped that oil would be discovered in the south west and transform the economy of that

region and also the state. Furthermore, the Home Mission was under instructions by the annual Assembly to begin reaching new towns with Baptist work.

The work begun 1961-63

Early in 1960, Rev Vic Bowring who had since taken over as Home Mission Superintendent, travelled with the pastor at Dalby, Jim Watson, west to Tara and Miles and found small groups of Baptists; this was a more positive result than Pastor Watson had found the previous year when he had visited as far west as Charleville. The trip inspired Bowring to find ways to minister to these people and others known to be living in Roma, Charleville and Mitchell, as well as reaching out to others with the gospel message.

The Home Mission decided that even though finance and personnel shortages meant that it could not begin work in a new town in 1961 as instructed by the Assembly, it could at least appoint a mobile pastor to work in the mid-west. The plan was to base someone at a suitable town and then visit people in other places in the region, conduct services and encourage the people to establish regular gatherings for Bible study and fellowship.

Already there had been many examples of itinerant bush missionaries in Queensland and elsewhere in the country. One of these was Thomas Beasley who in the 1880s was a colporteur with the Country Mission and then later he worked on his own in rural areas of Queensland. Fifty years later, the Baptist Gospel Wagon had proved that it was possible for Queensland Baptists to do the same on a denominational basis.

However, the idea of a mobile Home Missionary based a central point and travelling in the surrounding region was a new one for Queensland Baptists. Now the expected economic developments in the area were enough to motivate the Home Mission to proceed with the plan. What was needed was a pastor with calling and aptitude, a suitable vehicle to stand the rough roads and conditions, and a town with potential to form a base.

Pastor Appointed and Base Selected

It did not take long to find a suitable pastor. Mr Bowring noticed that one of the Home Missionaries, then stationed at Thangool-Biloela, seemed to be suitable. He was Pastor Norman C Butcher who had grown up in Wondai and Nambour; he was finishing his studies and was single. When approached, he responded positively, agreeing to serve in this challenging appointment for a two year term. Arrangements were finalised during the latter part of 1960 so that he could begin in March the following year.

When Pastor Butcher met with the HM committee on 14 Feb 1961 just before setting out for his new assignment, he explained that he would not be adopting the approach of the evangelists who had visited the area in earlier days but would instead focus on visitation and gathering people together for fellowship and Bible study. This approach, he said, meant that the work would be slow and would probably not produce speedy results or instant conversions.

Also it was not difficult to provide transport for Pastor Butcher, although the initial idea of making use of a van owned by the Evangelistic Committee proved to be not feasible. An International van, originally built as an ambulance and then in Townsville, was purchased at a cost of £500; it only required minimal attention, including a coat of paint, to put it in operational order - the additional cost was £100. On its trip down to Brisbane it achieved 18 miles per gallon travelling at 45 miles per hour!

The *Queensland Baptist* reported (April 1961) that no public appeal for funds had been made, but donations of about £100 were received spontaneously. The Sandgate Junior Christian Endeavourers contributed towards the cost of the hymn books, and later other Endeavourers provided a slide projector, while the HM Women's Auxiliary provided a Communion set; a portable organ was still required - a

call which the City Tabernacle took up!

Pastor Butcher began his work with an extensive survey of the area looking for the best places to focus his work. At Miles, with a population of 1500, he was able to build on good contacts previously made by Pastor Jim Watson who had often visited the area from Dalby, resulting in plans for a monthly service with up to 10 adults. There was a very good response from Roma where 14 adults indicated interest in attending a weekly services and being involved in a regular Bible study group; there was also good potential for a Sunday school. The leader of youth club catering for needs not met by other churches was also interested the Baptist work. Further west, Mitchell (population 1800) did not provide any hope for a Baptist work at the time, although there were other churches active there, and a Baptist family was expected to be moving in soon. In Charleville, population 5,000, there were 7 Baptists who were interested in a monthly service.

Because of its location and good prospects, Roma was selected as the base for operations. This town, with a population of around 5,500 at the time, on the junction of the Warrego and Carnarvon Highways, was recognized as the administrative centre of the rich pastoral and wheat district in 1862, and was named after the wife of Queensland's first Governor.

The first meeting was a mid-week Bible study group held early in March 1961 at a private home. Morning and evening services were commenced, and in May a Sunday School which also included adult classes commenced. There was steady growth, and by August, a ladies fellowship had been established; there was also a mid-week meeting, and Religious Instruction classes at the school. Meetings continued to be held in private homes but in mid-1962 they were moved to the Buffalo Lodge Hall. *(to be cont.)*

Baptist Heritage Queensland 29th Annual Report 2013

2013 has seen continued interest in our history by people in Baptist churches throughout Queensland. However there are still large areas of our history which have not been investigated in detail. Since the world is rapidly moving to a situation where nearly all information is accessible online, this has implications for the way historical records and data are stored. A subsequent paragraph will mention our initial steps in this area.

Our major publishing effort in 2013 was clearly the long-awaited third edition of *Baptists in Queensland*. So many changes have taken place in the structure of Queensland Baptists since the last edition, including a new name, new motto and new logo, that although major (and long-overdue) revisions were required, it was decided, for continuity of reference, to retain the same name. The editorial work was in the capable hands of David Parker. During editorial work the Executive of Queensland Baptists expressed interest, and as a result 1000 extra copies were printed for distribution to Churches. The book was launched at the Annual Convention.

The next publication in the works is about Baptist work in the South-West region of the State, covering roughly the Darling Downs and Granite Belt and west to the border. Baptist work in this region has its own difficulties, and this is reflected in a number of changes of names of churches over the years. Here again the editorial work here is being overseen by David Parker.

One venture which has continued during 2013 has been a short item about historical matters in each issue of the *Queensland Baptist*. Various people after reading it have commented "I didn't know that", and some have been encouraged to delve further into the history of their local church. We have noted with appreciation that our churches are taking greater interest in celebrating milestones, and would encourage other churches to follow. The collection of local church histories in the Archives is far from complete, and we wish to encourage churches to make a permanent record of events. The Union Archivist, Rev. Dr David Parker, is always ready to assist with this.

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