

Marrickville Baptist Church: One Century

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1: Beginnings

THE BEGINNINGS of Marrickville Baptist Church predate the first meetings, held in Winkle's Hall, "...near the Tram Sheds" on 13 Feb 1887. Petersham Baptist's first pastor, Rev. J.A. Soper, had long been anxious to see a Baptist work commence in the district, and, although Petersham Church itself was only five years old, it had already grown to a size where it could afford to lose a few members to a new cause. A number of Petersham's members were living in Marrickville at this time, so, when the Church was formed, they were available for the work. It does not, however, appear that Petersham was able to provide much financial assistance to the fledgling work.

The Marrickville Mission began on Sunday 13 February 1887. The official record states:

Rev. J.A. Soper, having long felt the need of establishing a Baptist Cause at Marrickville, a hall was procured in Illawarra Road... at a rent of 5/- per Lord's Day (The Rev W.A. Murray engaged to conduct morning services) evening services to be conducted by supplies...

The record continues,

Rev. W.A. Murray conducted the first morning service with an attendance of only 6 people: owing to the very inclement weather the evening service was abandoned. Lord's Day Feb^y. 20th Mr Murray again conducted the morning service with an attendance of 16. Rev. J.A. Soper conducted a special service in the afternoon

with an attendance of 60 people, Rev. J. Voller conducted evening service with an attendance of 24...

CONNEXION WITH REVIVALS

The Mr Voller mentioned in the above report had a close connexion with the revivals which had recently taken place in the country district of Thalaba (near Dungog). It is unfortunate that the records fail to report what he spoke about on that occasion. We note later that Rev. Mr Middleton, Marrickville's first pastor, moved to the Thalaba Pastorate upon leaving Marrickville.

GROWING INTO A CHURCH

Over the next weeks, the congregation continued growing steadily. ON 27 February, a Sunday School commenced with 16 scholars; two weeks later this had grown to 34, while the morning and evening Church attendances on that day were 20 and 44 respectively.

On 24 July 1887, the Church was officially formed. The Minutes report:

A number of members of the Petersham Church and a few from other Churches received the right hand of fellowship.

The Rev. Chas Bright, Chairman of the Baptist Union, gave the Charge & the Rev. J.A. Soper, and Messrs. Stone, Dixson and Morris took part in the service.

(A list of Foundation Members appears here in the record: see box, below.)

GROWING INDEPENDENCE

The new church was formed, but it was still by no means independent of Petersham. At a meeting of Marrickville Church on 9 August, a Building Committee was formed, consisting of

Messrs Soper, Dixson, Stone, Morris, Burton and the deacons...

Four of the men named were still members at Petersham. It is good to note that, even at this early stage, our forefathers so clearly grasped the Baptist traditions of Committee formation, as evidenced by their inclusion of the philanthropist tobacco merchant, Mr (later Sir Hugh) Dixson to a committee which aimed to spend money!

First Baptism

On 31 August 1887, Mr S. G. Tinkham was baptised at Petersham Church by Rev. Mr Soper, the first baptism from the new Marrickville outreach.

Entry to the Baptist Union of NSW

On 6 September, the Church resolved to join the Baptist Union of NSW and to request the supply of a Pastor. In the same month, the Church also raised £10/16/- towards land purchase. This was done by means of a Tea Meeting.

THE FIRST PASTOR: REV. A.J. MIDDLETON

Rev. A. J Middleton was an older man who had trained at Spurgeon's College in London, as had many in the early days of NSW Baptists. He commenced his ministry at Marrickville in November 1887. For a time after his settlement, his services were shared by Marrickville Church and an early Leichhardt Church. This is not today's Leichhardt Church, which commenced after closure of this earlier effort at church planting in Leichhardt.

The Baptist Union subsidised Mr Middleton's stipend by £75 p.a., on the basis that Marrickville and Leichhardt should each contribute equally to the

LIST OF FOUNDATION MEMBERS

Brothers:

Joseph Hawke
Leonard Turnham
— Gard
Griffiths Morris
Rachel Short (sic)
Cornelius Bentley

Sisters

Isabel Hawke
Mary Turnham
Rhoda Morton
Anne Phillips
James Short (sic)
— Huxham

remaining part of his stipend of £200 p.a.

Discussion with Leichhardt about possible amalgamation, held early in 1888, proved unsuccessful, and Marrickville appears to have enjoyed the major part of Mr Middleton's ministry over the next three years.

Conflict and struggle

Mr Middleton did not have an easy time at Marrickville. He arrived during a time of conflict which seems particularly to have centred on Mr Hawke and Mr Morton. The consequence was that both gentlemen withdrew from membership.

In May 1889, the Union notified the Church that it would no longer subsidise Mr Middleton's stipend, but it was not until July, when the grant actually ceased, that the Church really took serious, but largely ineffectual, action. At that time, it was noted that the offerings, once Hall rent had been paid, were just over $\frac{1}{4}$ of the full weekly amount to be paid to Mr Middleton.

Mr Middleton remained until 1890, but it was largely the Church's continued inability to meet his stipend which prompted his removal to Thalaba.

A further crisis for the Church was the threatened loss of the Hall, In this matter the Church acted more effectively, initially considering a site in Meeks Road to build a new building. However, this fell through before purchase could be effected. Almost immediately the present site in Silver Street became available for £200, and was purchased as a more central location. Mr Joseph Palmer, later President of the Baptist

Union, kindly purchased the adjoining property against future expansion of the Church, but was forced to sell it before the Church was in a position to acquire it.

MR JOB RUSHTON

A notable early member was Mr Job Rushton, who became a member in April 1888 after visitation. Contrary to a plaque in the Church Hall, he was not a foundation member, but he played an active part in the Church until his death in 1918. His children and grandchildren have also contributed in many ways to the Church's life.

Sadly, dissention broke out in 1895 between Mr Rushton and a Mr Doyle. Mr Rushton withdrew from attendances at services for some months.

The Church heard both sides of the story and finally asked Mr Doyle to transfer elsewhere.

Church Buildings

The Baptist Union was able to lend the Church the additional money needed to complete the land purchase and to build a modest building on the site. This is the present front portion of the Church Hall.

Mr Palmer laid the foundation stone for this building, which was opened with special services on 27 October, 3 November and 19 November 1889.

On the last of these days, the first baptisms were held in the new premises: Mr and Mrs Harding.

Highlights from Mr Middleton's ministry

In February 1889, Marrickville launched its own program of outreach. A Mission was commenced in St. Peters. It continued for some years. A Sunday School was an important part of this work.

The church was more than a little disturbed when, in November 1888, the Treasurer disappeared. Unfortunately the Minutes do not record what caused Mr Turnham to leave so quickly, but it appears that misuse of Church funds had nothing to do with the case — though some may have feared this at first! There was some initial difficulty in persuading Mr Turnham to return money and documentation, so it is possible that he disagreed with some aspect of the Church's financial plans. Eventually he settled into the Petersham Church, where he was, by all accounts, a respected and active worker.

In August 1890, Mr Middleton took exception to a report in *The Baptist*, as he believed it reflected badly on himself. As a consequence the Church resolved that all future reports for publication should first be presented to the Church. The Secretary, Mr King, gave notice of his intention to resign, but was persuaded to allow his notice to stand for three months. At the close of this period he resigned, citing ill health, and was succeeded by Mr Tinckham, the first person baptised at Marrickville Baptist.

THE SECOND PASTOR: REV. CHARLES BOYALL

Mr Middleton had left the Church at the end of 1890, and the Church remained pastorless for a period. It seems characteristic of this early period in the growth of the Church that there was both an air of innovation and an undercurrent of conflict. Perhaps these two things, if rightly channelled, keep a Church young and active!

Mr Rushton was taking a more prominent position in the Church at the time, but there were also conflicting movements in the Church's life.

A Mr Loach was very keen to get an Open Air work going, and the Church, although it agreed to the project, did not seem particularly enthusiastic. When Mr Boyall settled in as Pastor, Mr Loach left the Church. It is not uncommon for leadership issues to arise, particularly in a period when a Church has no pastor, so this may have been a factor in this situation.

When Mr Boyall conducted a Mission in April 1891, the Church was a lot more enthusiastic, and, while there is no record of the results, the Church was clearly well-enough pleased with Mr Boyall to call him as Pastor later that year.

In his book, *Some Fell on Good Ground* (p243), A.C. Prior notes that Rev. Charles Boyall was an evangelist working for the *Evangelist and Home Mission Society* until his call to Marrickville. While it appears that Mr Boyall had been acting as a part-time pastor at the Kingsgrove Church, and, in fact, continued taking some services there after commencing at Marrickville, his induction at Marrickville is described as

...his first pastorate in church records.

He remained at Marrickville until mid-July, 1895.

Unlike Mr Middleton, Mr Boyall was quite young at the time of his commencement at Marrickville, and had a particular interest in Young Peoples' work. During his time, the Y.P.S.C.E Society was formed (a Christian Endeavour group). It continued functioning until well after World War II. The Open Air work, which had commenced with such scant enthusiasm, grew to the point where the church decided to purchase a small organ for the work. Also a Committee was formed to undertake the running of

...Entertainments...

for

...the better providing of funds and the better advertising of our Church.

Growth, but a background of difficulties

During the year 1892, the Church grew by the addition of 9 members. It was also able to put 10/- aside for tracts and handbill printing. On the other hand, it was not easy to get members to attend Business Meetings, and, in 1892, concern was expressed about the number of members who were not attending services.

An encouraging sign was that Mr King, the secretary who had resigned during Mr Middleton's time, returned to active involvement. But that year one of the deacons resigned before the end of his term, and Mr Boyall presented a motion to have the business of the Church conducted by a Committee of

Management. This was to consist of the Pastor, the five remaining deacons, and six others. As this proposal would have excluded only about five of the regular attenders, one wonders what the difficulties with the meetings really were!

On 3 May, in discussions over a request from Kingsgrove Church for Mr Boyall's services for one Sunday evening per month, there was considerable heat, and a Mr Hampson was taken to task for making objectionable remarks and for calling the Pastor an objectionable name — unfortunately not recorded for posterity. Mr Hampson subsequently resigned as Financial Secretary, and was suspended from all business meetings of the Church until he apologised.

Mr Hampson refused to do so until August, when he was restored to fellowship. However, in the meantime, the July meeting had been moved to a private home when Mr Hampson had attended and refused to leave.

It is pleasing to note that, after this time, a number of applications for membership were received and, by mid 1894, membership seems to have stood at 53.

A LONG PASTORATE: PASTOR NUMBER 4 — REV. JOHN STRAUGHEN.

It took the church one year and nine months to settle in a new pastor after Mr Boyall's departure. The new man, Mr John Straughen, commenced in 1897 and ended his ministry in March 1911, which makes Mr Straughen one of the most significant influences on the Church during its "Young growth"

phase. The Church lost ground during the period without leadership and, even a year after his induction, membership was only 36. But the issue of *The Baptist* for 22 October 1898 reports with pleasure the addition of eight members. For most of Mr Straughen's pastorate, membership grew, peaking at 94 in the years 1909 and 1910 before declining in the final months of his stay.

Building extensions

By 1904, the Church had paid for its original buildings, and a further loan was taken out to pay for extensions.

WANSTEAD MISSION

1907 saw the commencement of the Wanstead Mission, later known as the Undercliffe Mission and then the Undercliffe Church. Though initially lacking a fixed site, the work continued steadily.

In Feb 1908, Marrickville Church was told how one of the Wanstead Sunday School scholars had been led to Christ during a serious illness.

In 1922, the work received its first Student Pastor, a Mr A.C. Donaldson, who was followed by Mr. T.H. Gallard.

During the time of Rev. Mr. Wingfield, no Students were appointed, but the practice was resumed under his successor, Mr A. Wilkins.

In 1943, when Mr Wilkins was pastor, a separate membership was established.

The Undercliffe Church, as it became known, closed in 1962.

The re-opening services were held on 4 October 1904, not quite 15 years after the opening of the original chapel.

Personalities

During Mr. Straughen's ministry, Mr. L.H. Field (1900) and Mr G.M Ball (1905) responded to God's call to full-time ministry.

As the Church grew during these years, it also enjoyed a period of consolidation which the people had not previously known. This may partly account for the availability of people like Messrs Field and Ball, and was probably also a factor in the comparative lack of conflicts through these years.

The ministry closes

At the meeting of 5 December 1909, Mr Straughen notified the Church of his intention to resign, but was dissuaded from acting when a deputation of deacons approached him.

He finally concluded his ministry in March 1911.

One of Mr Straughen's successors, Mr W. H. Wingfield, wrote of John Straughen and his wife, that he was ...an earnest preacher of the Word and a faithful pastor. He and Mrs Straughen had endeared themselves to a wide circle of friends, and their departure was keenly felt throughout the district

— *Marrickville Baptist Church and Sunday School Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (1937) p.11

MINISTRY OF REV S.A MACDONALD

Again the Church had a lengthy period without a pastor, although a Mr J.T Wynn briefly acted as Interim Pastor.

Mr MacDonald, the fifth Pastor, was not long out of training when he began his ministry at Marrickville in 1913. Only six years earlier he had sat for his College entrance examinations.

Alan Prior (*Some Fell on Good Ground*, p 232) describes him as one of the period's leaders in evangelism, together with Archibald Jolly and one or two others.

The pastorless period following the end of John Straughen's ministry had seen substantial membership losses — 20 in 1911 and 28 in 1912 — so that membership was now down to 58. But seven more were baptised, and ten transferred in, while several lapsed members were restored to fellowship. With a few losses as well, by mid 1913, membership reached 73. By the time Mr MacDonald left, numbers were back around where they had been towards the end of Mr Straughen's ministry — 89 people in membership.

The *NSW Baptist Yearbook* for 1915/16 reports that Marrickville was making "...steady progress."

Other aspects of Mr MacDonald's ministry

Mr MacDonald was State Secretary of the Baptist CE Society at this time, and was instrumental in developing the Church's own Societies in this period.

The Ladies Fellowship was also reorganised during Mr MacDonald's time.

Building matters

During this period, the Church

acquired the adjoining property, previously purchased by Mr Palmer and then resold. It was used as a Manse.

In 1914 the so-called "Primary Room" or "Blue Room" was erected.

Subsequent history

After Marrickville, Mr MacDonald ministered in Victoria, but later returned to this State, where he was also with the City Mission for a time.

At the time of the 1987 Marrickville Church Centenary, several of the older members were still in contact with Mr MacDonald's daughters and somewhat younger son. His second wife, whom he married while at the City Mission after his first wife died, was still living in Concord, and active in the Ministers' Wives' Fraternal (as it was then known).

MR BAILLIE

The Church Secretary during Mr MacDonald's ministry was a tireless worker, but had an impact from another angle,

A native Scot, he was instrumental in settling a number of Scottish families like the Wallaces, Michies and Hunters into the Church. Some of these families were still active in the Church at the time of the Centenary.

Mr Baillie's son, John, responded to a call into the Ministry during Mr MacDonald's time, and later died while ministering at the Mortdale Church.

Mr Baillie's efforts gave the church a strong Scottish flavour for decades.

2: A Maturing Church

It is possible to view the first thirty or so years of the Church as a trime of “growing up.” There was experimentation, and setting of patterns and traditions. In retrospect, some decisions were unwise, but that, too, is part of growing up. Other decisions were a vital part of making the Church what it was to become.

Then came a period of consolidation and settlement. Certainly the dates chosen to delimit this period are somewhat arbitrary, But there is a clear pattern of consolidation throughout the period which began somewhere in the sixth pastorate and ended in the massive social changes which followed World War II.

REV. E.J. ROGERS (SIXTH PASTOR)

Mr Rogers began his ministry on 15 October, 1917, and concluded it on 13 December 1922.

It is difficult not to be too brief in describing this pastorate because it was not nearly as marked by turbulence as some which preceded it.

The Church had not been unscathed by the change of pastor, and Mr Rogers came to a fellowship which retained only 77 of the 89 members with which Mr MacDonald had left it. However, by the next year, membership had been raised to 123 and, despite some decline in the next years, there were always some baptisms and, even at the close of his ministry, membership stood at 112. It was not until 1956, well into the period of post war decline, that Membership fell below that figure.

Mr Rogers appears to have been more of a pastor than an evangelist as his predecessors had often been, and was still remembered in the 1980s by former Marrickville people as the pastor who had married their parents or conducted their own dedications, or was the first pastor that they remembered.

His great concern for the Undercliffe work should be remembered as well, and it bears repeating that it was during his ministry that the first two Student Pastors were allocated to Marrickville Church to take specific charge of the Undercliffe work. (See box, previous page.)

THREE GREAT “W”s

By some coincidence, the Church's three next pastors all had names grouped near the end of the alphabet: Wingfield, Wilkins and Wilson.

Apart from that, they had quite different ministries, as shall appear.

What follows must also be read against the pressures of the times in which they carried out their ministries. The Great Depression, the Second World War, and Post War Immigration are only some of the more often remarked-on phenomena of the thirty-year period from 1923 to 1953.

W1: REV W.H WINGFIELD

It is almost impossible to do justice to Mr Wingfield's long ministry. From 1923 to 1941 he was not only a leading light in the local Church, but also in Denominational affairs from the District to the State. He was, in fact, President of the

Baptist Union for 1938/39.

Membership statistics

As Mr Wingfield commenced only months after Mr Rogers left, there were no great changes to membership at first, but ten losses in his first year were made up for by 11 additions to the roll. However a wholesale roll revision the next year brought membership back down to about 126.

One difficulty in assessing membership during this period is that reporting for the whole time from Mr Wingfield's arrival to after Mr Wilson's departure is most charitably described as erratic.

A report of 179 for the 1939/40 year (published in the 1940/41 Yearbook) does not square with figures supplied in 1939, and the Church perhaps never exceeded 172 members in Mr Wingfield's time. Certainly a reported 168 members in 1937/38 does not square with a figure of 161 derived from other sources.

A sidelight (and possible partial explanation) is that, from 1926 to 1929, the Wanstead (Undercliffe) work receives a separate mention.

Building up strength

Mr Wingfield had the knack of seeing the need and responding effectively to it. The folktales which circulate the Church about the Men's Work at that time are abundant, and older people have many fond tales of his efforts with children and young people. When a new family came to the Church, he would match the children with other

similarly-aged children already in the Church, and encourage the established child to support the newcomer. Such a relationship was encouraged between Ivy Whitley and one of the daughters of a newly arrived Scottish family, Georgina Paterson. This friendship could typify many which endured until ended by death.

Mr Wingfield never claimed to be a great preacher, but he encouraged the work of such evangelists as Rev. W.L

A COVER-UP

Early in Mr Wingfield's time, the Church commenced a program of renovation and additions. At that time, the upstairs Sunday School Hall was built.

What caused great consternation was the covering of the timbered ceilings with plasterboard, supplied by a member who manufactured the material. Contemporary observers reported that the Church nearly split over the issue, with some of the anti-plasterboard party suggesting that the motives of the person who donated the materials were less than pure, as he gained a lot of advertising through the project.

It is entirely uncertain whether this strife has any connexion with the departure of 10 members in 1923 and a further 26 in 1924.

Very little of this affair reached the Minute Books.

Jarvie who conducted a successful tent Mission in Marrickville Park. Several Marrickville Baptist people recall that Mission, and some who remained for the Centenary were converted through that effort.

The work of the Church's own Open Air Band had by now largely been subsumed into the work of Open Air Campaigners, who were active in Marrickville. It was through that organisation that former Deacon and Secretary (to 1983) Bill Hunter was converted and brought into the Church.

Because Mr Wingfield's ministry encompassed the Great Depression, it will be expected that there would be some notable welfare work. In fact, Mr Wingfield was known not only for his pastoral concern for the needy, but also for his very practical support on many occasions. He often paid for the needs of a person in distress from his own pocket, but always without fanfare. Those who were close to him long remembered how some shopkeeper — or the person who had received aid would "give the game away."

A notable conversion

At one time, all the Church's deacons had been converted during Mr Wingfield's ministry. One notable conversion was of the Editor (or, in some versions, the Deputy Editor) of the Communist newspaper, *The Tribune*. This man had been sent to report on Mr Wingfield's activities after he had made a statement that the Party objected to. He went to criticise and returned Christian.

Unfortunately, although that story was found in several verbal but largely identical sources, no written record was

found for this paper.

The wider ministry

During Mr Wingfield's time, the Sporting Groups were also significant. The NSW Churches Cricket Association owes its beginnings to the Marrickville Baptist Church's Cricket Club, although its link with sponsoring churches is now less definite than at that time.

Another innovation was the Marrickville–Bankstown (later Canterbury–Bankstown) District Association, the inaugural meeting of which was held at Marrickville Church with Mr Wingfield the inaugural President as the initiator of the Association. Mr S.F. Tanner, from the Marrickville Church, was the Secretary.

Mr Wingfield was President of the Baptist Union in 1940/41, and a student pastor, Mr (later, Rev) Neville Anderson, had pastoral oversight of the Church in that period.

W2: REV A. WILKINS

Mr Wingfield's somewhat grim appearance belied his caring disposition. Mr Wilkins was a man who combined a cheery appearance with a cheery personality. He followed Mr Wingfield in 1942 after a brief gap, but his ministry was hindered by the escalation of the war.

A notable feature of his ministry was the commencement of advertising of the Church in the Baptist Yearbooks.

At the time Mr Wilkins arrived, the Church purchased a new Manse in High Street, Marrickville, to replace that on the lot adjoining the original Church building. The old Manse became a

Care-takers' residence.

As an Airforce Chaplain, Mr Wilkins was away for long periods during the war. Even after the end of belligerence, he continued working part-time in chaplaincy while pastoring the Church. He was very well-loved by most, but his absences caused some to criticise him for not giving enough time to the local fellowship. Whatever the rights and wrongs of this situation, his achievements are plain: despite the difficulties of the war years, membership continued rising after an initial drop of 19. Neither the war years nor the creation in 1942 of a separate roll for the Undercliffe Church could halt the climb. The peak recorded membership figure was in 1945 and 1946, with 180 or 181 members — the top figure in the Church's history. Unfortunately, a roll revision in 1947 cut this back to 150 so, although there had been previous revisions, it seems that the Church had been hanging onto a number of members whose real links to the Church were somewhat tenuous!

One effect of the war was the major adverse effect on the youth/young adult work.

During his ministry, Mr Wilkins was increasingly losing his sight, and, in the years after he left Marrickville, he developed a significant ministry to the blind.

THE LAST W: REV J.B. WILSON

The ninth pastor, J.B. Wilson, came to Marrickville from Blackheath. Perhaps his time should be seen as "the last fling of middle age" for the Church.

1949 began with a new pastor, a new Secretary and Treasurer, and a membership of 128 after roll revision.

Over the next years, membership grew to 137 and then to 140. Where Mr Wilkins' advertisements in the Yearbook emphasised the Church's availability for ministry, the advertisements from 1951 took on a greater emphasis on successes.

However, when membership declined again to 127 in 1952, the emphasis returned to ministry and service times.

During Mr Wilson's time a number of matters related to the fabric of the church were dealt with. A long-standing fight against borers in the pulpit was brought to a satisfactory conclusion; the portable organ used for Open Air work was repaired, having become exceedingly delapidated; paths were repaired, and a neon sign was installed.

At this time, facilities were established for the deaf, and a variety of minor maintenance jobs and repairs were concluded.

Mr Wilson also facilitated a number of Evangelistic Missions with speakers from Open Air Campaigners and other organisations.

Towards the end of Mr Wilson's ministry, Mr Herbert Clendinning became Church Treasurer, following in the footsteps of his brother-in-law, Mr Wallace.

Mr Wilson concluded his ministry at the end of 1953.

3: Decline into old age

THE EXHUBERANCE of youth gave way to the stability of middle age; but, from about 1952 or 1953, the Church began to decline, although this was not immediately apparent. Much of the blame for the change must be placed at the feet of the massive social and political changes which affected Australia at the time — and which affected the inner City suburbs more dramatically than some other areas. However the Church also displayed an inability to cope with the changes, a tendency to want to maintain continuity with the past. Perhaps the very stability of the previous thirty years made it more difficult for the Church to adapt quickly. After all, when we face loss, it is natural also to react by attempting to conserve what we still have. However, this does not help a declining Church.

Between Mr Wilson's departure and the next settlement, there was a period of stagnation and conflict. The Church's Constitution allowed a small number to control decisions about the Pastorate. It being hard to please all the people all the time, the Church had some difficulty in determining whom it should call.

THE TENTH PASTOR, REV A.J TESTER.

Mr Tester began his ministry in 1955 at a time when membership had reached 114; it declined further to 99 during the next year before beginning to climb again to reach a peak of 113 in 1962 and 1963. However, by the time Mr Tester left in 1965, it had dropped

again to 105.

Mr Tester is probably best remembered for his organising skills. During his ministry Mr and Mrs Grebert, who had been caretaking the Church moved to a new home in Schwebel Street and the old Manse site was redeveloped with the new Chapel, opened in 1961. The new building provided seating for about 230 people and gave the Church a suitable meeting hall in the form of the old Chapel area. The new Hammond organ purchased for the new Chapel is still in the building, and was in regular use until the 1990s.

It is not recorded where the old organ went. It was a large reed organ and was considered a quite significant instrument in its time.

In Mr Tester's time, a major cause of numerical decline was the rising cost of housing in the inner City. As the young people married, they moved away from the district to places like Castle Hill. It is interesting that business advertisers in *The Baptist* before World War II were concentrated in places like Marrickville, Newtown, Petersham and Stanmore; by Mr Tester's time, it was clear that Baptists were moving to suburbs like Greenacre, Castle Hill and places in between. Often the names in the new areas were the same as those in the inner city twenty years earlier.

There were also losses to Pentecostalism at the time, with a number of members thinking that the Apostolic Church in Newtown offered a better

way forward than Marrickville Baptist did. One couple also became Quakers.

Among those who moved to the Apostolic Church were Ivy Whitley, who had had conflict with Mr Tester about fund-raising for the organ. She attracted some other members to the church with her, but a number later returned to Marrickville Baptist.

Some newcomers claimed that change was resisted, or that they did not find a ready welcome into the Church, and they moved on.

Finally, the diversion of energies into building work didn't help with the development of real ministry and nurture, although these works were vital in other respects.

Verbal accounts suggest that these shortcomings went almost entirely unnoticed among the leaders of that time.

REV STAN BUTCHARD: PASTOR 11

When it is considered that Mr Butchard contributed so much both the Bankstown Baptist Church and to the Denomination after leaving Marrickville, it is clear that his abilities didn't find their fullest scope at Marrickville. The slide was too great to curb.

The 104 members he found on arrival in 1965 had evaporated to 63 on his departure in 1972. He was a Canute against the tide of change. Marrickville had become a Greek community. Although the Church tried to reach some of this new group, not even the use of a Greek-speaking interpreter helped achieve any breakthrough into the new groups in the community.

One positive in the Church's life was that the members finally recognised that change really had struck, although much of the reaction was little more than ineffectual thrashing around.

On a negative side, the Church doesn't seem to have been able to see the things which remained and on which it may have been able to build.

In mitigation, it should be seen that most churches will go through such a phase as part of how it accepts and responds to change.

PASTOR No.12: REV. MR. CAMERON

Mr Cameron arrived at the end of 1973 after another period of conflict and indecision about replacing Mr Butchard. Sadly, Mr Cameron died early in 1975 — a pastorate of roughly 18 months.

For a time after his death, Mrs Cameron continued a visitation ministry for the Church, while a Dr Wherry and a Pastor Leon Smith filled the pulpit.

Both these preachers were men who were going through serious personal issues at the time, which limited their ability to serve the Church; however, they held the fort until the Church could find a satisfactory solution.

PASTOR No. 13: REV J. NOLAN

There was a two year break before a successor to Mr Cameron was appointed. Sadly, Mr Nolan survived barely 14 months before he, too, died.

Mr Nolan arrived in Marrickville in 1977 after a pastorate at Granville Church. Marrickville was his third

Baptist Pastorate, but he had had ten years of ministry in the Congregational Churches before that.

At the time of his death, membership had dropped to 36.

PASTOR No 13: MR BRIAN POWELL (Student Pastor)

Undaunted by the low survival rate for Marrickville's Pastors, Brian and Julie Powell arrived at the beginning of 1980 with their twin children.

At the time, Mr Powell was a third year student at the Baptist Theological College of NSW. During his time in Marrickville, there was a slight upward trend in membership, but his short tenure did not allow these gains to be consolidated, and membership began declining again after he left.

A significant innovation was the commencement of a Playgroup by Julie Powell.

It was already clear that some members were seriously losing hope for the future of the Church. However these losses also created some gains, as some of the previous leadership either moved away or relinquished their grip on leadership, leaving room for others to bring their unique gifts to bear on the problems of ministry.

During Mr Powell's time, the Constitution was extensively revised, and the ability of a small group to stymie pastoral appointments was reduced.

After several subsequent pastoral appointments, Brian became Lecturer in Theology at the Baptist Theological College. Julie has a private clinical psychology practice.

PASTOR No. 15: Mr GLENN ARNOLD (Second Student Pastor)

Glenn was also a third year student when he and Stella arrived with their four children at the beginning of 1982. In his time, Stella developed the Playgroup further, while Glenn continued some of the teaching themes emphasised by Brian, such as those relating to the nature of the church and to fellowship.

Glenn and Stella moved the evening service to the Manse but, with small children being fed and going to bed at the time, some found it an unsuitable solution.

Closure plan

However, the Church was becoming more despondent, membership dropped further, and, in late 1983, the Church decided to close down. Some already linked the Church's survival hopes to the survival of the Secretary, Mr Bill Hunter, and the Treasurer, Mr Wal Clendinning, men who had faithfully held their positions for many years and were perhaps the only continuing points of real stability in the Church.

However, before the decision to close down was ratified, a group led by Joan Oates moved a recission motion, which was carried.

At the end of Glenn's ministry, the Church was resolutely living on. Glenn moved to Toukley Church and then to an independent Church before moving out of Christian ministry.

PASTOR No. 16: Mr PETER GREEN (Third Student Pastor)

Unlike Brian and Glenn, Peter was in his second year of study when he ar-

rived at the beginning of 1984 with his wife, Christine, and their four children. Consequently, he had three years ahead of him before the situation would be reviewed.

The initial situation was one of confusion. The secretary, Bill Hunter, had been hospitalised since December following a major stroke. Wal Clendinning (Treasurer) had admitted his wife, Rose, to *Aminya* nursing home a couple of days after Bill's stroke and had followed her there within a fortnight.

The Church had appointed Mr Tom Oates as Secretary for the purpose of negotiating with Peter, and Mr Fred Bantin had inherited some of the Treasurer's duties while Wal continued to do the banking and accounting. Both Mr Oates and Mr Bantin were considered as stop-gap appointments at the time. Membership was down to 25.

The Church ratified Tom Oates as Secretary, a position which he held until , while Mr Bantin was succeeded in 1984 as Treasurer first by Dr Peter Burchett and then (from 1986) by Mr Nephthali Bautista. Mr Bantin continued on the Diaconate for a number of years.

Other features of the period

At the beginning of Mr Green's pastorate, the Church had already lost its Sunday School, the Brigades, the Ladies' Guild and the Youth Groups. The morning service continued and the Wednesday night prayer meeting. Evening services had been suspended and then reinstated for Mr Green's commencement.

Playgroup was still notionally functioning, but in recess, and some members participated in a district-wide

prayer fellowship for the then Sudan Interior Mission. The Church had largely abandoned the opportunities it had had for making new Community contacts.

Among the first efforts to correct this shortcoming was the beginning of a system of holding a tea before evening services — which had been moved back to the Church buildings, in part to affirm that the Church was "live enough" to maintain two services. Later, a light supper was instituted at the Manse for fellowship-building.

Chris Green also worked on the Playgroup in order to provide a real caring ministry in the Community, and to serve as a bridge to people in the district. It was successful and attracted the interest of the Department of Community Services as a support group for mothers, but always lacked resources.

An adult Sunday School class was commenced, but, after a few weeks, Dr Burchett, who had transferred to Marrickville from Newtown in 1984, began a more conventional Sunday School which grew rapidly and absorbed members from the Adult class as teachers. These staffing problems continued throughout the life of the Sunday School.

Miss Gloria Goff formed a rudimentary Youth Group which functioned for a number of years, though the members tended to come mainly from the Green family. It was a good support for the Manse family and created some good relationships between the Church and some of the school children from the district

Another new feature was Home

Groups for Bible Study and Fellowship. The one led by Mr Tom Oates for a number of years was particularly successful.

These were an outgrowth of a Group formed to prepare for the 1985 Leighton Ford Crusade in Sydney.

Mr Nephthali and Mrs Divina Bautista formed a Filipino group in 1986 which continued for about two years, and Mrs Green led an informal Bible Study after Playgroup for several months with two ladies who had professed faith in Christ.

This is an account of the Church's situation to 1987.

4: Lessons from this account

A MAJOR problem which any church faces is that of pastoral change. Under long-term pastorates like that of Mr Wingfield, losses still occur, but not as a result of people grieving and becoming demoralised as a consequence of change. Long Pastorates give a church opportunities to devise policies against a background of stability — as long, of course, as it can control other factors, such as conflicts.

Marrickville Church suffered short-term pastorates for many years, from 1973 to 1984, though only partly through its own fault. We can only conjecture why God allowed the Church to face these changes.

Another problem has been the Church's dependence on a single "common interest group." Although this can be a significant factor in church growth and effective evangelism, it does not support long-term growth. It is clear that a significant portion of the Church's growth from around the time of the First World War was through the ability of Mr Baillie to attract fellow Scots into the Church. With some inter-marriage, there was a large kinship group formed around the Wallace, Paterson and Baillie families. Rushtons, Murphies, Clendinnings and Hunters married into the group.

At one point, at least a quarter of the Church membership was within this informal cultural association.

To an extent, what made for numerical growth of the Church also tended to exclude newcomers, who found it dif-

ficult to develop a sense of belonging.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with growth through common interest groups: in fact, it is a basic principle of Church growth. But the Church failed to see that it needed to manage what it had in order to include those who did not belong easily to groups like this.

An overview of the Church's hundred years also shows that, from time to time, powerful people gained and held power. In fact, even some of the pastors were probably oriented towards gathering power, and possibly tolerated the power-gathering activities of those whom they considered trustworthy (non-threatening) underlings.

This led to a tendency in the Church to deny problems rather than deal with them, particularly when the problems related to abuse of power — as, for example, when there were conflict related to the appointment of a new Pastor.

It should be remembered, of course, that those who have power in a Church are not necessarily those elected to the top positions!

Finally, the Church has tended to believe that friendliness, which has long been a real and valuable quality of the Church, is the same as real Christian love. However, the Church did do a lot of work on love in the few years around the Centenary, which has paid dividends.

POSSIBILITIES:

In 1987, Peter Green wrote,

"Marrickville Baptist Church has the potential to be great again, and is heading that way once more. The community is one in which we are presented with more people of different backgrounds than perhaps any other community in Australia. It becomes quite difficult to focus on any particular group as a target for ministry. However, we are proceeding in accordance with the principles of Acts 1: 8,

- Beginning *where we are*
- with the *resources at our disposal*
- reaching out in care *to those we can most readily reach*
- *depending on God* to move us further as he wills."

He continued,

"In a sense, the last decade has been a time of reinventing the Church. In a sense, this process has really been concentrated into the years from 1984 to 1987, because, while the three Student Pastors all taught remarkably similarly about what the Bible says to a Church in Marrickville's situation, both Mr Powell and Mr Arnold were speaking prophetically to a Church still clinging to its former life. Under the present Pastorate, the Church has left its past. It has died, and resurrection is taking place.

The process of reinvention is not a simple one, though. It has involved each of us in allowing God to change us. That has often only been possible after the Church has suffered until it sees the principle God wants us to see in that particular situation. We have learned about giving through the Great

Termite Attack. We have learned about priorities through near bankruptcy. We have learned about loving through the pain of relationships. We are beginning to understand the radical nature of the Gospel as we have seen the inadequacies of some of our 'folk-theologies' in a situation like ours."

"Marrickville Baptist Church is already different from what some of us will remember from our childhood. Some of us will like it, some will hate it. We want to be open to the Holy Spirit, as he leads us into all the truth. So we desire neither to become comfortable in what we are doing right now, nor to be discouraged by what we don't like in our present stage. As John Robinson said to the departing Pilgrims,

The LORD hath yet more light
and truth to break forth from his holy
Word.

FINAL NOTE:

This account is far from complete. Many aspects of the past have been omitted. Matters such as the Girls' Zenana Missionary Union, the Church's role in the formation of Padstow Church, or its contribution to the beginnings of the Nieuw-Buinen Baptist Church in Holland are not there. This was written as a biased story: written in order to illustrate how the past has shaped the present. It was written for instruction and admonition as Marrickville Baptist Church entered its second Century.

For this reason, apologies are also due to people such as the various Col-

lege Students who had some involvement in the Church as Assistants, Observers or workers gaining financial or experiential support while undertaking their courses. They have not been individually listed. However, because of his significant role in Mr Wingfield's Presidential Year, Rev Neville Anderson has received a special mention.

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SOURCES:

Other than the Church Minute Books, which are still in the hands of the Church, and oral histories from present and past Church members and attenders, information has been obtained from

A.C Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground*
W.H. Wingfield, *Marrickville Baptist Church Jubilee Booklet (1937)*

Back issues of *The Baptist* and *The Australian Baptist*

Yearbooks of the Baptist Union of NSW

DISCLAIMER

The opinions in this document are those held by the author at the time when it was written in 1987, and with the information available to him at that time. Although in some instances based on information conveyed by others, the interpretation and weight put on that information is entirely the author's own work.