



Hello Everyone,

It was sad to hear of the passing of Dorothy Turnbull who, together with her husband Roy, wrote the book *Turnbulls on the Coromandel in 1802*. To maintain Dorothy & Roy's legacy and make their work available in future years we are seeking contact information for their immediate family. If you can help please get back to us as below.

In this newsletter we have focussed on Ebenezer Church pioneers James & Jane Davison, the source of information being mainly Ron Arndell's *Pioneers of Portland Head* and Hawkesbury Gazette articles written by correspondent George Reeves who was passionate about the pioneer story of Ebenezer Church.

Floods are part of the history of the Hawkesbury, the pioneers experiencing not one but two 14m floods in 1806. Three floods occurred in 1956 and the interesting experiences of Ebenezer teacher Marie Holmes during flood time are also included in this newsletter.

As part of the Australian Heritage Festival we are holding an **Ebenezer Church Heritage Day** on 20th May. A similar day last year proved to be a popular event. Details for bookings are on Page 2.

On Sunday 18th June we will be celebrating **our 208th anniversary**. You are most welcome to join us for an 11.30am service followed by lunch. Our speaker will be Peter Worland, Executive Director, Uniting.



Jazz evenings in the grounds of Ebenezer Church have proved popular and have raised valuable funds for constructing clean water wells in villages in West Papua. We will be holding another jazz evening in October. Further details will be on our website closer to the event.

Ted Brill

On behalf of the Ebenezer – Pitt Town Congregation

From the Minister

We recently went through the trauma and grief of having an elderly dog put to sleep. It all happened rather quickly and upset our equilibrium. Such events turn our world upside down and inside out. After a time we began the process of finding a new dog. Our (adult) children insisted on a puppy and so it was that we found a 2 month old Border Collie – Cattle Dog cross. His name is Nico (short for Nicodemus).

It has been fascinating to interact with him and watch as he learns about the world. There are new experiences that scare him and cause him to be unsure and insecure. He brushes up closely to us for protection. Other times he boldly takes on the world as a big adventure, always learning and expanding his boundaries.

I often think about the founding families of Ebenezer-Pitt Town. They experienced the turmoil and world-changing move from the city of London to the wilds of the Hawkesbury – what must have felt like a God-forsaken place with its strange creatures and odd flora, the hot climate and upside-down seasons. What drew them onwards in this momentous undertaking? What sustained them in their life-changing journey? There would have been grief as they left home, family, friends and familiarity.

Like little Nico, they must have had moments of uncertainty, fear and confusion where new experiences, sounds, people and places disturbed their equilibrium and challenged them. There would also have been moments of fun and discovery, freedom and new life as the adventure unfolded.

It was far from easy and only a sense of being called by God could have driven them so strongly. In all of this journey and experience they held trust in God as paramount; as sure and certain as the river that flowed past their properties and gave life. As sure as the seasons that enabled crops. As sure as night became day, God was this ever-present source of hope in a changing, confusing, delightful world of wonder and life.

I wonder what sustains you and me?

Grace and Peace.

Geoff Stevenson

This newsletter is sent to 242 postal and 350 email addresses across Australia and to New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Donations to meet the costs of production and postage are appreciated and may be forwarded to the church secretary at the address as below.

If donating by EFT, bank details are Uniting Financial Services, BSB: 634634, Account: 100014363. Reference: Newsletter. An email informing us of your donation would be appreciated.

Should you receive the newsletter by post but now have access to email, please let us know.

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An Ebenezer School Teacher's Experiences of the 1956 Hawkesbury River Flood

Miss Marie Holmes took up her position as assistant teacher at Ebenezer Public School in 1956, the headmaster at that time being Mr Cecil Wood who taught 4th, 5th & 6th Class. Her classroom was the 'hat room', the verandah of the 1902 brick building that still stands in the playground today. In that small space she had 25 pupils in Kindergarten to 3rd Class.

Even so Marie Holmes enjoyed teaching at Ebenezer. She wrote:

'The parents were delightful and I was constantly referred to as 'our Miss Holmes' in the 'District Doings' [in the Hawkesbury Gazette] whether I was teaching dancing or having a cold!!! And I never did find out who was the correspondent!'

Of the 1956 Flood Marie Holmes recalled ...

1956 was the year of the really bad floods. The first time we got trapped at school when the river rose suddenly we drove back to Windsor via Mt Victoria. The next day Mr Wood closed the school and he and I took ourselves off to Windsor School. The staff were quite agreeable but not exactly welcoming so at the end of the day Mr Wood asked me how I would feel about going to Ebenezer in the flood boat!

It sounded pretty good to me so I agreed readily and we met at the flooded Windsor bridge the next day. (Somehow Cec had arranged for us to be picked up on the bank of the river at Wilberforce.)

I can tell you that I wasn't quite so confident when I saw the small open boat with an inboard motor, laughingly called the



The Flood Boat at Windsor Bridge. Mr Wood is fourth from the left.

'flood boat'. We boarded the boat and the river was running so fast we were literally catapulted along with branches of fruit tree scraping the bottom and we seemed to reach Wilberforce in about ten minutes! We were then delivered – a bit muddy and damp - to school. Sometime during the afternoon the Dads arrived to take us back to Wilberforce.

And that's when the fun started. The river was running so fast that it took ages for the driver to manoeuvre the boat to shore. And then we faced the slow drag home. There were times when the boat put out the same power as the river and we would be stationary for what felt like an eternity.

From that time on I prepared myself mentally and physically to swim, as I was sure the old boat would one day founder and sink. So I carried nothing, wore shoes that I could kick off and left my watch at home.

I thought it would be a bit forward of me to ask Cec if he could swim. I hoped he could, because I could visualise the headline – 'Ebenezer assistant teacher swims to shore leaving aged headmaster to drown.'

After quite a few days of this ritual I was becoming quite blasé and feeling very much like a pioneer adventurer. Then one day while waiting at Wilberforce and watching the ritual to get the flood boat in to the shore, I realised that something quite bizarre was happening. In the flood boat was a coffin attended by two undertakers in full mourning dress, starched collars and top hats. Even Cec looked stunned!

Apparently this poor person had to be buried on the Wilberforce side and, after some difficulties, the coffin was hauled out of the boat and put on the back of a ute and was taken off for burial.

So there we all waited in the drizzling rain for the undertaker to return so that we could start the slow ride home. Nobody in the boat spoke a word. My recollection is often or so people all studiously avoiding looking at the two who looked like they'd shipped out of a Charles Dickens saga! I remember taking a little peek and noting they both had frayed cuffs on their shirts!! Looking back I'm always astonished that I chose that time to become a red-head with the aid of a bottle of 'Titian Highlighter'. Every day I sat in the flood boat (sans umbrella – I was getting ready to swim remember?) and was conscious of the rivulets running down my face being red!' *Marie Hall, Nee Holmes [We thank Marie Hall for permission to share this article.]*

EBENEZER CHURCH HERITAGE DAY



2017 Heritage Festival Event
Australia's oldest church,
Ebenezer Church
Sat 20th May 2017
11am to 3.00pm
Ebenezer Church
95 Coromandel Road, Ebenezer

This event includes a talk on the church history, a two-course lunch and walk-and-talks in the colonial graveyard, to the historic tree, riverside beach and quarry.

Cost: \$30 adults, \$15 children.

Bookings essential. tedbrill@bigpond.com (preferred) or 0419 449 362 and (after 5th May) 02 4579 9235

Ebenezer Church Pioneers James & Jane Davison

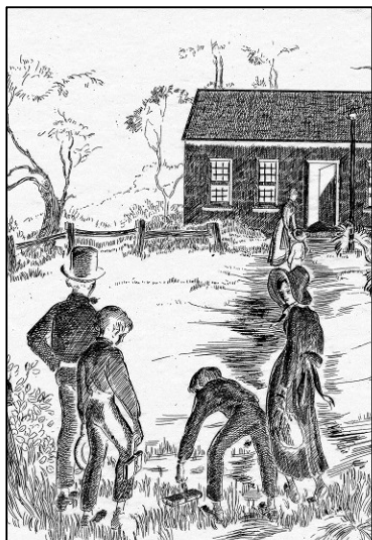
James Davison was a native of Northumberland, a farmer at Alnwick on the Alne River, fifty miles south of Berwick on the Tweed. This was also Andrew Johnston's home town, and in the same County George Hall's father was a tenant farmer of the Duke of Northumberland. No doubt these three families were well acquainted, especially as James Davison's wife, Jane, was Andrew Johnston's sister.

James and Jane Davison had only two children, both sons, and both born in England. John was 3½ years old, and James 20 months, when they sailed from Deptford on 13 February 1802.

After spending the first year at Toongabbie, James settled on his grant of 100 acres at Portland Head, which was bounded on the south by Owen Cavanaugh's, on the north by John Howe's and on the east by the Clarence Reach of the Hawkesbury River. Here James set to work with a will to wrest sustenance from the virgin land to support his family and to build his home.

Though the country provided no natural supply of meat for the settlers, save kangaroo and wallaby, there was a plentiful supply of fish in the river. Several of the settlers would have a seine between them, and have no trouble pulling a hundred or more perch and mullet into their boat on a calm night. No doubt the children spent many happy hours fishing for the big perch with rod and line during the day, or trolling at night with small frogs for bait.

Seine fishing had to cease momentarily in 1804 when Governor King ordered that all boats on the river after dark were to be confiscated. This was to deprive the convicts of the means of escaping, and thieves of a handy getaway. Maybe this had little effect on the forthright settler working his seine, and though net fishing was prohibited in the Upper Hawkesbury, farmers still netted the fish which they considered theirs by right. This attitude persisted perhaps because in the early surveys the centre of the stream was the boundary between grants, so that opposite farmers each owned half the river along their boundary, and therefore half the fish.



The two Davison boys John and James were fortunate in living within easy walking distance of the church school. Others, because of the distance, or their parents' fear of them being attacked by natives, boarded at the school. There was always the possibility, too, that, in skirting round the farms along their short cuts to the school, they might cross the path of a cranky boar and be attacked.

James Davison had the prescribed two convicts assigned to help him work his farm. One of these, William Ball, at the half-yearly fair held at Parramatta on 2 October 1823, received the prize of twelve dollars for good conduct during eleven years' service with James Davison.

James Davison was a generous contributor to various funds during his lifetime. His name is on the Ebenezer church list for the amount of £5 per year, towards the payment for a minister for the church. He donated to the Waterloo Fund

of the year 1816 and many other patriotic and loyal lists. In January 1908 when Governor William Bligh was overthrown by the military James Davison was not ashamed to say on which side he was, his name being included on lists of Hawkesbury settlers' confidence in Governor Bligh.

James' daily work was devoted to agriculture and fruit cultivation and improvement in the breeding of stock. But, like other church pioneers, he was community-minded and was a Grand Juror at Windsor for the years 1825-26-27.

In 1811 James Davison and his son John received grants of 50 acres and 60 acres respectively at Kurrajong and then in 1825, after Howe's discovery of the Putty route to the Hunter Valley, James and his two sons were given an order by Governor Brisbane to purchase grants totaling 900 acres. These later grants were not taken up.

The elder son John married Susannah Yates, daughter of Hunter settlers. They were married in Ebenezer Church in 1831 by the first ordained minister Rev. John McGarvie in the presence of Mary Ann Turnbull, of Portland Head, and John Anderson, of Portland Head.

John spent his life farming on the original grant at Portland Head. This grant, to which was added by purchase Owen Cavanaugh's, remained in the family and was farmed by James' descendants for over 150 years.

The younger son, James, married Eliza Maria Suttor, daughter of George Suttor and Sarah Robinson of "Chelsea Park", Baulkham Hills. Here James courted Eliza, whose home was a halfway house for him on his way to Sydney with the produce of his father's farm at Portland Head.

Soon after his marriage James purchased 30 acres from Henry Fleming. This was the western portion of Tyler's grant of 1797, which was cut off from the larger portion (which became known as Bligh's Farm) by the road from Pitt Town to the river bank, now known as Bathurst Street.

In 1827 James was unjustly accused of stealing cattle and sent to Moreton Bay. Also in 1827 a sad time occurred as three Ebenezer Church pioneers died within seven days – Mary Hall on 29th June, James Mein on 3rd July and Jane Davison on 5th July. Of Jane Davison it was written: 'She was a kind and tender mother, a virtuous wife, and a pious good woman; her death is deeply felt by her afflicted husband and relatives.'

James Davison, 66 years of age, died four years later in 1831. They were both buried in Ebenezer churchyard, described by Gazette correspondent George Reeves as 'that glorious ground of rest, where all the worthy old pioneers of the river desired their bodies to be - next to where they worshipped in life, and where, after life's fitful fever they sleep well.'

(George Reeves also chose the Ebenezer Church graveyard to be his last resting place.)



The track to the church through Davison's property

The Darkinung People



In 1789, a boat expedition led by Governor Arthur Phillip 'inland' into the ranges first encountered Aborigines on the Branches of the Hawkesbury River northwest of Sydney and on returning there by land in 1791 he confirmed that they were a different people to those Aborigines whom they knew on the coast. They were friendly to white explorers and were referred to as 'The Branch' natives.

Research by Dr Geoff Ford on the Aboriginal people of the Hawkesbury is not widely known but has now become accepted.

The original inhabitants of the Hawkesbury district were the **Dharug** tribe of Aboriginal people. Their neighbours across the river to the north-west were the **Darkinung**, the boundaries of the Darkinung being from Wilberforce and Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury River to Singleton. That area includes Ebenezer,

(Darkinung is most easily pronounced Dark-in-yung.)



MAZDA MX5's

The MX5 President's Picnic was held at Ebenezer Church in September



2016. On that occasion our volunteers served lunch for 172 people who filed through the church hall and then moved outside to picnic sites. A great day in brilliant Spring weather.

GRONO FAMILY REUNION

The next Grono Family Reunion will be on
Sunday 7th May 2017 from 10.00am
Ebenezer Church, 95 Coromandel Road, Ebenezer

Mandy Waller, 1 Johnston Street, Pitt Town, NSW, 2756
email: gronofamily@gmail.com
web: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gronofamily/index.htm>

STUBBS FAMILY REUNION

The next Stubbs Family Reunion will be on
Saturday 28th October 2017 from 9.30am
Ebenezer Church, 95 Coromandel Road, Ebenezer

Reg Smith 02-9634-1187
email: stubbs1802@gmail.com
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