

## Chapter 2

### A Church is Built

## A Church is Built

The history of the Caboonbah Undenominational Church was prepared by Ealhswith (Witty) Drane (nee Somerset) for the celebration of its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Much of the material presented here is summarised from her recollections.

In the early days before there was a Protestant church in the Mt. Beppo district church services in the district were held every second Sunday, alternating between the Somerset and Soden homesteads. H.P. Somerset took some or perhaps all of the services and led the singing while his wife accompanied him on the organ that had been given to them as a wedding present. When the services were not held at Caboonbah, the organ was loaded onto a wagonette and transported for the occasion.

By 1901 Katherine Somerset's parents had commissioned the very beautiful Victoria Chapel, designed by the famous ecclesiastical architect Robin Dods, to be built on Cressbrook station. Four years later Katherine had designed the new Caboonbah Church for Mt. Beppo residents with verandas on both sides. The vestry was located at the end of one verandah with a mothers' room as a mirror image of the vestry on the other verandah. There was another innovation with a very modern flavour. Two railings on the road side verandah could be lifted out so that Mrs. R. D. Soden Snr., who was wheelchair bound, could be wheeled onto the church verandah directly from the back of the dog cart that had brought her to church. Local history has it that initially the Caboonbah organ was transported that way as well.

Before the land for the church and its cemetery was given to the community, green timber was offered to Lars Andersen, who operated a saw mill at Esk and later at Toogoolawah, in exchange for seasoned timber for building. This timber was used by Andersen to build the Caboonbah Church after building St. Agnes' Church of England in Esk, six years before. The church building was completed in 1905.

The evidence for Lars Andersen building the Caboonbah church is drawn from a hand written and undated minute that reads as follows:

*12<sup>th</sup> March. Met at Sodens. Decided to have five trustees appointed for Church ground.*

*Decided to fence in Church Ground - asking tenders for the work - fence to be three barbs and one plain wire - Posts to be dressed and not less than 5" x 3" sound timber - erected with the flat to the wire (Wires tied on) Gate posts to be squared and pointed above ground and sapped below, - 3" x 1 1/2" sawn bolted on to the posts, 6" above rail cut pointed would look well on the road side. Anyhow and I suggest alternate tenders be called for this in lieu of the plain top wire.*

*24<sup>th</sup> Jan. Mrs. Somerset, Messrs Smith, Milner W. and Bob Soden agreed for timbers etc. for the Church, Tank of water carted, and Plan*

*Mr. Andersen to write out agreement, including tank, shingling of whole roof, glass for windows, Cedar or Stained Pine for Altar rails etc., dressed verandahs and shingles, rails round verandah, Height of Church off ground at lowest point.*

*Messrs Milner and Bob Soden to see Mr. Andersen on 27<sup>th</sup>. To speak to Mr. Somerset about cemetery arrangements & fence etc.*

It seems likely that these minutes relate to 1904 and 1905 and therefore represent the earliest minutes of the Caboonbah church. The final emphasis on cemetery and fencing probably relates to the fact that two parishioners had already been buried in the Caboonbah Church cemetery between these two meetings and before the arrangements for the church building were finalised.



**Caboonbah Undenominational church with shingle roof**

The Church was financed by private donation and fundraising activities and it was almost free of debt when it opened. Two of the fund raising events have passed into local history. The first was a day of water sports held below Caboonbah cliffs and still recalled by older residents for the shooting of the bunyip. The bunyip appears to have been the creation of H.P. Somerset. A floating log was covered by a bullock's hide with a calf's head attached on the cliff side. On the right hand side of this there was a bulls' eye as a target and the bunyip was filled with explosives. The whole fantasy was towed around the bend of the river behind a row boat and it created a sensation at the time. Locals were encouraged to shoot the 'creature' (for a price), and its final demolition must have been spectacular.

There were also other sporting competitions like swimming, canoeing

and "climbing a greasy pole with pig attached"<sup>i</sup>. Two of the Somerset children (Rollo and Doris) supported their father in the bunyip theme when they found a nest of young bandicoots and displayed them as baby bunyips at a penny a peep. It is reported that they contributed 10/- to the building fund, which represents 120 pennies from a very generous or a very large crowd. In the evening, for those stalwarts who were not exhausted, there was a ball in the stable lofts that were being built when H.P. Somerset recorded the first of the 1893 floods.<sup>ii</sup>

The second fundraiser appears to have been a little more decorous and was described as a "concert at the Mt Beppo School"<sup>iii</sup>, with sufficient artistic talent to attract the McConnel families from Cressbrook and Mt. Brisbane and the Lumley-Hills from Bellevue station. While accordions, concertinas and banjos provided the dance tunes for the previous Water Sports Ball, it seems likely that the Mt. Beppo concert would have also satisfied the classical tastes of the British and German immigrants there.

Sadly, one of the prime movers for the development of Caboonbah Church, Mr. R. D. Soden Snr, did not live long enough to see his dream realised. His family had settled at Mt. Beppo in 1885 and his home, along with Caboonbah homestead, had been used for Sunday worship for many years. He died in January, 1905 and was buried in the cemetery there, before the Caboonbah Church was complete. It is recorded that his was not the first burial on the site. His 2 year old grandson son, Richard, son of E.W. Soden was buried there before him on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1904<sup>iv</sup>

### Trustees of Caboonbah Church

There were five original trustees for the Caboonbah Undenominational Church and they were (in the order in which they appeared on the first Certificate of Title) “John Thomas Milner, David Walker Smith, Charles Henry Soden, Edward William Soden and Robert Dawson Soden, all of Mt. Beppo & Caboonbah”.

### J.T. Milner

J.T. Milner has been described as one of the original residents of Lower Cressbrook, along with W.H. Fuge, E.J. Cannell, G.W. Michael and J.R. Watts.<sup>v</sup> He married Olga Emma Wolff and they had 11 children: Chris, John, Mary, Olive, Frank, Nita, Richard, Somerset, William, Reg and Edna.<sup>vi</sup> None of the Milner family is buried at Caboonbah Cemetery. John Thomas Milner is recorded as attending the first Meeting of the Esk Presbyterian Church, St. Andrews<sup>vii</sup>, and both John Thomas and his wife Olga are buried at Esk cemetery (9 April 1942 & 10 June 1952).<sup>viii</sup>

### Edward William Soden



**Mr. & Mrs. Edward William Soden**

Edward William (Bill) owned a farm across the road from his father's property. He married Minnie Nofz and died in the first year of World War II (12 February 1941). He is buried in the Lutwyche cemetery with his younger sisters Lizzie Daniells and Jane McLeod. Bill had four daughters and one son Richard who was the first recorded burial in the Caboonbah Church Cemetery

### David Walker Smith



**Mr. & Mrs. David Walker Smith**

According to Mrs. Drane, David Walker Smith was working at Caboonbah when he first became a trustee of the Caboonbah Undenominational Church, and there is a stern photo of him with his wife. He was a lean man with a big beard who was born in Aberdeenshire, Scotland on 10 June 1855. He left England for Sydney with his parents, four brothers

and one sister on 12 September 1855 on the steam ship "Bee". He married Sarah Taylor on 12 August 1879 in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Esk. He would have been a man of 50 when he became a trustee of the Caboonbah Church and was the first of the trustees to die on 7 September 1920. He is buried at Kilcoy Cemetery and his wife, Sarah, and one sister are buried at Cressbrook private cemetery where he was almost certainly working at the time of their death. Like the McConnel family, he was a Presbyterian and there is a plaque on the altar of Presbyterian Church, Toogoolawah in honour of Mr. & Mrs. David Walker Smith Mrs. Don Wade, who lives in Toogoolawah, is descended from this family on her mother's side.

Charles Henry Soden



**Charles Henry Soden**

The three other original trustees of the Caboonbah Udenominational Church,

Charles Henry Soden, Edward William Soden and Robert Dawson Soden, were the three eldest sons of the late R.D. Soden Snr. Charlie Soden, as the eldest son, had bought a farm next to the original Soden property that had been selected by his maternal uncle James Mortimer in 1885. In 1904 there were share farmers working this property and Charlie was living at Harlin where he owned the Harlin store and the Harlin Hotel. He was able to provide much needed financial support for the continued development of the Caboonbah Udenominational Church when his father died. Like his father and his brother Robert, Charles Soden was buried at Caboonbah Cemetery on 26 May 1937 aged 67. His widow of 14 years, Bertha Caroline Soden, was also buried there on 17 March 1951 aged 76.

Robert Dawson Soden



**Robert Dawson Soden II**

Robert Dawson Jnr. was 31 when his father died, and he inherited the original Soden property and the care of his widowed mother. He also took over the mail contracts around the Cressbrook and Caboonbah-Mt.Beppo

district that his father had held since 1894 when he had established a Receiving Office at Mt. Beppo.

Robert Dawson Jnr. had taken advantage of the night school classes offered by Mr. R.A. Stubbins, the first Head Master of Mt. Beppo School, when it opened on 4 Sept 1893 by which time Bob was a strapping 'lad' of 19. With this late education, he was well equipped to take over his father's job as Postmaster when he died and was a good choice for Treasurer and Trustee of the Caboonbah Church.

Robert Dawson Soden Jnr. discharged the responsibilities of Postmaster until his retirement, and Treasurer and Trustee of the Caboonbah Church until his own death on 29 August 1950. He and his wife Williamina Roberta are buried in Caboonbah Cemetery. Marjorie Soden married Eric Barrett and their ashes lie at her parents' graveside.

Mrs. Drane recalls that, "As far as I can remember, Mr. Bob Soden always took up the collection"<sup>ix</sup>. He was survived by one son Bob, who became a Church Trustee in his turn, and two daughters. One of his daughters, Ruth, married Les Langton who was the brother-in-law of J.T. Milner's son John. Ruth Langton still lives in Toogoolawah and continues to take an active part in the annual Caboonbah Church Service in November.

The original Schedule of Trusts that defined the operation of these Trustees is not available, but the one drawn up for the trustees of the Caboonbah Church on 28 May 1963 reads as follows:

#### "SCHEDULE OF TRUSTS

It is agreed that the above described land shall be held by the abovenamed Trustees upon the Trusts following, that is to say:-

UPON TRUST for the persons resident at Caboonbah & Mt. Beppo & Parish of Cressbrook in the State of Queensland belonging to the congregation of any Christian Denomination approved by the Trustees and to permit and allow religious services of such denomination to be held and conducted in any church chapel or building which may be erected on such lands at such times and upon such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the said Robert Charles Kenman, David Geoffrey Cannell, Robert Dawson Soden and Margaret Alvina Schultz PROVIDED ALWAYS AND IT IS HEREBY AGREED AND DECLARED that if the said several Trustees hereby constituted or any of them or any Trustee or Trustees appointed as hereinafter provided shall die or desire to be discharged or refuse or become incapable to act then and in every such case it shall be lawful for the surviving or continuing Trustees or Trustee to appoint a new Trustee or Trustees in the place of the Trustee or Trustees so dying or desiring to be discharged or refusing or becoming incapable to act as aforesaid and upon every or any such appointment the number of Trustees may be augmented or reduced AND THAT the said several Trustees for the time being may reimburse themselves respectively or pay and discharge out of the said premises all expenses incurred in or about the execution of the Trusts or powers of these presents.

**R. C. Kenman**

**D.G. Cannell**

**R.D. Soden**

**M.A. Schultz**

TRUSTEES

Correct for the purpose of Registration

**Young & Hurwood**

**Solicitors for all parties."**

The last Trustees for the Cabonbah Church in 1983 before its incorporation were Robert Charles Kenman, Irwin David Masters, John Charles Kenman and Arthur Henry Somerset following the deaths of Robert Dawson Soden (III) on 10 May, 1980, aged 62 years and Margaret Alvina Schultz on 28 October 1978 aged 81. The third Robert Dawson Soden is buried at Caboonbah cemetery with his father and grandfather, and Maggie Schultz lies in the Esk cemetery.

The original layout of the Caboonbah Church cemetery suggests that “the congregation of any Christian Denomination approved by the Trustees”<sup>x</sup> included Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Roman Catholic congregations. Mrs. Drane recorded that, “A cemetery adjoined the Church grounds and was arranged in the form of a cross for burial of people belonging to four denominations”.<sup>xi</sup>

The top two quadrants were made available for Anglican and Presbyterian burials and the lower two were reserved for Catholics and Methodists. The Catholic congregation did not eventuate and the Methodists, who were relatively few in number but very significant in support for the Church, elected to join the Anglicans so that effectively only the top part of the proposed cemetery was used. The present fencing represents this arrangement.

#### Church land

The title deed of the land on which the Caboonbah Undenominational Church is built does not precisely reflect its oral history. The original deed of grant (No 43865) for the property was registered on 4 July 1881, surrendered on 7 December 1900 and finally

returned to James Henry McConnell and Eric Walter McConnell under a Deed of Grant under the provisions of “The Corrected Titles to Land Act of 1883” on 8 June 1901. At that time the parcel of land was described as “three hundred and eighty one acres one rood thirty eight perches.”<sup>xii</sup>

On 14 February 1900 J.H. & E.W. McConnell mortgaged the land for £2,200 to John Cameron (Bill of Mortgage No. 342096) with repayments of £4 per centum per annum. Barely a month later Henry Plantagenet Somerset took out a lease over the land for 10 years (Lease No. 345345). The original mortgage was released and another mortgage on the property was taken out with AMP Society for £2600 on 12 February 1903 with repayments of £5/10/- per centum per annum. On 20 April 1905 2 acres 2 roods of this land reverted to the Crown (New Title No. 137223).

A request was made to issue a Certificate of Title for 83 acres 27 perches on 27 June 1905 and another one was made for a further 205 acres 31 perches on 13 March 1906.

On 25 November 1907 2 roods was transferred from James Henry McConnell and Eric Walter McConnell to the Trustees of the Caboonbah Undenominational Church: John Thomas Milner, David Walker Smith, Charles Henry Soden, William Soden and Robert Dawson Soden (No. 422328)

It seems likely, from this documentation, that H.P. Somerset secured the property on a 10 year lease so that it was available for the Undenominational Church and negotiated with his brothers-in-law so that it was not included in the final sale of this property in two parcels in 1905

and 1906. The transfer of land, however, appears to have come directly from the McConnel family who had already provided land for St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Esk (1876), the Biarra Church (1886) in the township of Biarra and would later provide the land for the beautiful St. Andrews Anglican Church, Toogoolawah (1912). The terms of the transfer are not recorded.

### Early Services

By the time the Caboonbah Church was established, there were rectors for the Presbyterian (St. Andrews) and Anglican (St. Agnes's) churches in Esk and at the Roman Catholic Church (St. Mel's) whose parish extended to Nanango. There was a Methodist Congregation served by the Crows Nest Circuit in a church built in Esk in 1883 and later moved to Toogoolawah in 1907. The Free Church built by Henry McConnel at Biarra township had also been moved to Toogoolawah to serve as the Union Church/Chapel there. Without motorised transport in the early years of the twentieth century, the tyranny of distance was a very real barrier to regular church attendance

Mrs. Drane recalls that, "Caboonbah Church is thirteen miles from Esk and we were only able to have one service a month, on account of the distance to be travelled (by the minister). My father would take a service in between to help. The services were always held from 11:00 a.m. to 12 noon and clergy would have their midday meal at Caboonbah, before going on to Cressbrook, another nine miles, for service in the little chapel there."<sup>xiii</sup>

The early ministers who served the Caboonbah Church are recorded in the details of cemetery burials. They include Reverends Holt & Morgan-

Jones (Anglican) and Rev. Henderson (Presbyterian) between 1904-1918, Rev. Henderson (Presbyterian) and Rev. Munro (Anglican) between 1918 and 1938; Reverends Foote & Grey (Anglican) between 1943 and 1953 and Reverends Richardson & Munro (Anglican) between 1955 & 1956. No minister is recorded in the burial details between 1956 and 1997 when Fr. Reg Mills officiated with Rev. R. Cameron officiating in 2003.

Miss Eunice Smith, Toogoolawah freelance reporter, sought a list of Protestant ministers who had served the Brisbane Valley before 1965 and the replies to her request appear in Queensland Times<sup>xiv</sup> report of 2 November, 1965 and are reprinted in full on p57. All of the early ministers mentioned provided occasional services for their congregations at Caboonbah Church.

Stories about the eccentricities of the various ministers, apocryphal or not, abound. One involves the first Anglican service in the Church which was being conducted by a new and somewhat unworldly arrival from England. During the service he had not noticed the many dogs that accompanied their masters attacking a snake vociferously underneath the church. His congregation left to deal with the commotion one by one until only the minister, Mrs. Soden Snr. in a wheel chair and H.P. Somerset were left. After the snake was dispatched the congregation returned and the service continued.

One Presbyterian rector, Mr. Lundy, chose to ride a bike from Esk for the early services. Another 'new chum', Rev. Mervyn Henderson M.A. (1916-1923), served the church and the district for many years and always allowed his horse to set the pace of his

sulky ride from Esk. On one occasion he was so late that his parishioners feared for his safety but his horse had only stopped to feed somewhat extravagantly along the way.



**Mrs. R.D. Soden in the wheel chair that required the removable verandah rail for her direct entry to Church from a dray.**

Mrs. Drane was a child of eight when the Caboonbah Church opened and she lists clergy she could remember who provided services at the church. They included Rev. Gilbert (Anglican), Rev. Peach (possibly Cherry) (Methodist), Rev. Demouth (Anglican), Rev. Foote (Anglican), Rev. Heiner (Methodist), Rev. Richardson (Anglican), Rev. Cole, Rev. Wilson (Methodist), Rev. Seaton, Pastor Davis (Baptist), Rev. Van Der Klay (Presbyterian) and Father Perry (Anglican). She also recalls the early parishioners who included, apart from the Soden and Somerset families, the Milner and Cannell families of Lower Cressbrook as well as the Bryant, Gray, Eastell & McDonald families, the Smith family & Albert Carter from Caboonbah and

the Dumke, Linke, Greinke, Nufz, Schanks, Jaenke, Webb, Waite, Brough, Lee and Geddes families from Mt. Beppo and Mt. Esk Pocket.<sup>xv</sup>

Initially Mrs. H.P. Somerset had played the organ for the early church services. Later H.P. Somerset's married daughter Doris Waite took over as organist. Support for the Caboonbah Church was regularly provided by the teachers of the Mt. Beppo School who often read the lessons in the early years.



**Mr. & Mrs. H P Somerset and young family**

Another teacher, Mr. E. W. Spreadborough who had a beautiful singing voice, trained a choir of young people for the church. This choir broke up when he enlisted for WWI. Sadly he was killed in action, along with many other young men from the district. The Caboonbah Church took its place, along with other community services, in helping to rebuild the little community it continued to serve in the post-war years.

<sup>i</sup> Address by Mrs. Katharine Andersen on The Early History of Caboonbah Church, given at Caboonbah Church, 1985

- 
- <sup>ii</sup> Recollections of 1893 Flood by H.P. Somerset, reprinted in Toogoolawah Centenary 1904-2004 p 33  
“On the morning of the first 1893 flood, a building comprising 10 stalls for horses, two harness rooms, a loose box, a carpenter’s shop, a beef house and a long buggy shed, with **lofts nine feet high above** was all completed, except laying down the flooring in the lofts.”
- <sup>iii</sup> Address by Mrs. Katharine Andersen on The Early History of Caboonbah Church, given at Caboonbah Church, 1985
- <sup>iv</sup> Burial Records for Caboonbah Undenominational Church, Appendix
- <sup>v</sup> Queensland Times, Tuesday June 18, 1929, p5
- <sup>vi</sup> Toogoolawah Centenary 1904-2004, Local Legends: “Ann Milner”
- <sup>vii</sup> Esk Presbyterian Charge Centenary Book 1876 - 1976
- <sup>viii</sup> Toogoolawah Centenary 1904-2004, Local Legends: “Ann Milner”
- <sup>ix</sup> The History of Caboonbah Undenominational Church 1905-1975 by Ealhs with Anne Matilda Drane, p2
- <sup>x</sup> Schedule of Trusts for Caboonbah Undenominational Church, 1963 (see above)
- <sup>xi</sup> The History of Caboonbah Undenominational Church 1905-1975 by Ealhs with Anne Matilda Drane, p2
- <sup>xii</sup> Deed of Grant under the provision of “The Corrected Titles to Land Act of 1882” No. 87922, County Cavendish, Parish Cressbrook
- <sup>xiii</sup> The History of Caboonbah Undenominational Church 1905-1975 by E.A. Drane
- <sup>xiv</sup> Queensland Times, Tuesday 2 November, 1965
- <sup>xv</sup> The History of Caboonbah Undenominational Church 1905-1975 by E.A. Drane