

Chapter 7: The Caboonbah  
Undenominational Church



Caboonbah Church 2004

This undenominational Church is the last of the union churches in the district to continue to operate as such. Like the Apostolic and Lutheran Churches, it is also located at Mt. Beppo.

The Caboonbah Church was built in 1905 by Lars Andersen, Sawmiller from Esk and Toogoolawah who had also built St. Agnes's Church in Esk. This church was designed by Katherine Somerset (nee McConnell) wife of H.P. Somerset who was the Member for Stanley from 1904 to 1920. It is named after their original homestead "Caboonbah".

Like the Union Church the initial roof of the Caboonbah Church was shingled as shown in the photo below.



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.

These verandahs were unusual in church design at the turn of the century that still reflected the neo-Gothic dimensions of cathedrals being built at the time. However, Katharine Somerset had shared with her brother and sister-in-law the discussions they had had with architect Robin Dods who designed Victoria Chapel at Cressbrook. As ecclesiastical architect he was trying to adapt the Arts & Crafts philosophy to buildings in Queensland and verandahs featured prominently. They were not incorporated into Victoria Chapel built in 1901 but they did feature in Caboonbah Church design that was built four years later.

The verandah facing the road had a unique and very practical design feature. There were two railings on this verandah that could be lifted out completely 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.

The pulpit and pews were donated by Lars Andersen and are thought to have been made by the cabinet maker Hans Christian Andersen, who was his brother.



Mrs. R.D. Soden centre

Before the church was built, Protestant families at Mt. Beppo held alternating services at the homes of H.P. Somerset and R.D. Soden. The Somerset family had an organ that they had received as a wedding present and this was transported to accompany the singing when services were not held at Caboonbah.

In a newspaper report of the Diamond Jubilee of Caboonbah Church in 1965 it was reported that the Lutheran Church at Mt. Beppo was also used for these services before 1905.<sup>1</sup>

H.P. Somerset took the Anglican services when there was no minister to do so. Both he and his wife played the organ, and Katharine Somerset conducted Sunday school. After the church was built H.P. Somerset continued to conduct Anglican services once a month to relieve the pressure on the visiting clergy.

The fund raising carnivals for this church were certainly original. Perhaps the most famous of these events was "Shooting the Bunyip". The local lads were encouraged to pay for the privilege of shooting a bunyip with a small prize for the winner.

The bunyip was a log covered by cowhide with a calf's head at the front towed very far behind a row boat. There was a target on the side of the 'bunyip' at which the shooters aimed. What they perhaps did not know, but the rower in the boat well out of the way did know, was that there were explosives in the log and the winning shot blew the bunyip literally out of the water.

This story has become so much a part of the district's folklore that the Brisbane Valley Historical Society, with its headquarters at Caboonbah

homestead, has taken Billy Bunyip as their logo.

The land for the church and cemetery had originally been leased by H.P. Somerset from his wife's relations, J.H. & E.W McConnel and in 1907 they formally transferred the land to the five trustees of the Caboonbah Undenominational Church. The trustees at this time were J.T. Milner, D.W. Smith, C.H. Soden, E. W. Soden and R.D. Soden.

Even the list of original trustees tells a poignant story. One of the original driving forces behind the building of this church was R.D. Soden Snr. who died before it was built.

Robert Dawson Soden was a pioneer of the Mt. Beppo district who arrived in 1885 after working with cotton at Pine Mountain alongside the South Sea Island indentured labourers at that time. He had selected property in the district; he was also the local Post Master, very active in civic affairs and instrumental in getting a school for Mt. Beppo. He was buried in the Caboonbah Cemetery in January 1905 five months after the burial of his grandson, Richard, son of E.W. Soden.



First burial in Caboonbah Cemetery

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Times 2/11/1965(3)

It was for R.D. Soden's widow that the verandah railings were designed as removable, so that she could enjoy the church her husband had worked so hard to establish.

The cemetery had originally been set out in a cross design with each of four denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Roman Catholic) having the right to one section of the cemetery. Those two sections closest to the church were made available for Anglican and Presbyterian burials. The lower two were for Roman Catholic and Methodist burials.

There were no Roman Catholic burials and the Methodists elected to be buried with the Anglicans. The Cemetery as it appears now represents only half of the original design. This cemetery is always open to the public.



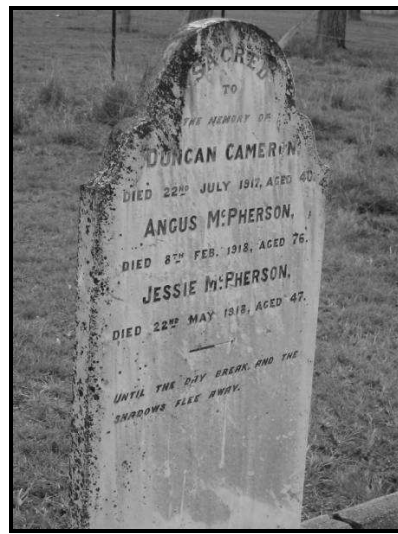
Caboonbah Cemetery

With the eventual opening of the Toogoolawah public cemetery in 1910 the urgent need for Protestant burials in the Mt. Beppo district was reduced, and only those families with a strong tie to the adjacent properties continued to use the Caboonbah cemetery.

There were only 8 recorded burials there between 1904 and 1921 and they are listed below.

**Early Burials in Caboonbah Cemetery**

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Death date
1	Richard Soden	M	2yrs	16Aug1904
2	Robert Dawson Soden	M	67yrs	3Jan1905
3	Julia Soden	F	32yrs	15Nov1906
4	Mary Frances Soden	F	69yrs	25Dec1911
5	Duncan Cameron	M	40yrs	22Jul1917
6	Angus McPherson	M	76	8Feb1918
7	Jessie McPherson	F	47	22May1918
8	James David Mortimer	M	69	29Jun 1921



Cameron & McPherson headstone

With the prospect of the Wivenhoe Dam flooding sections of Caboonbah homestead, three headstones have been re-erected in the Caboonbah cemetery for children who were buried in a family cemetery at Caboonbah Homestead before this cemetery was opened. Two were Somerset infants and another Soden boy (see below)

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Death date
1	Edward Kingsley Plantagenet Somerset	M	9mths	26Jan1891
2	Vida Somerset	F	7days	8Dec1891
3	Richard Soden	M	14yrs	9Nov1893

Richard Soden fell from his horse in front of the Mt. Beppo School and was transported by dray to Ipswich hospital only to die there three days after he started his horror journey.

Vida Somerset may have contracted an infection during the

birthing process from which she did not recover. The Somerset headstones are shown below.



Headstones for Edward and Vida Somerset

A full list of the recorded burials in this cemetery (Caboombah Cemetery) can be found at

<http://www.ozgenonline.com/aust-cemeteries/>

Instructions after opening the website (which can be done at most public libraries for those without computing facilities at home) are as follows.

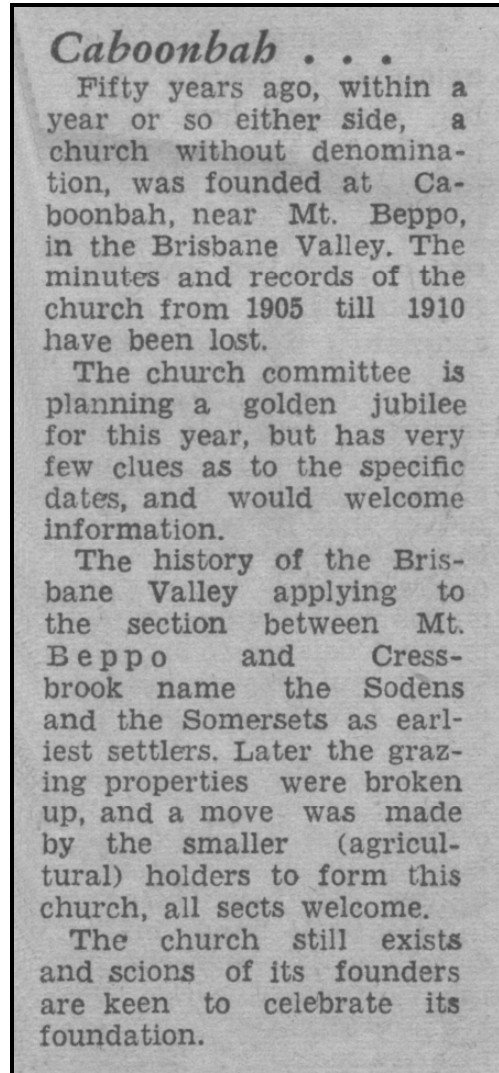
1. Click on Queensland from the State menu on the left hand side
2. Click on C (for Caboombah Cemetery)
3. Scroll through all the cemeteries starting with C until a box with Caboombah Cemetery appears.
4. Two menu options appear: "On Line Data" that is a list of burials in the cemetery or "Headstone Photos". Click on your choice.

Please note that there is a lot of repetition in this file.

It is not possible to say with certainty how the first service at Caboombah Church was celebrated or who provided the dedication. As with the other churches in the district the very early records have been lost. This led to some hilarious correspondence prior to the celebration of the Golden Anniversary where each correspondent had forgotten the details himself, but recommended the person who had

already recommended him as a reliable informant.

In desperation the following advertisement appeared in the Queensland Times<sup>2</sup>.



From Queensland Times 3 June 1955

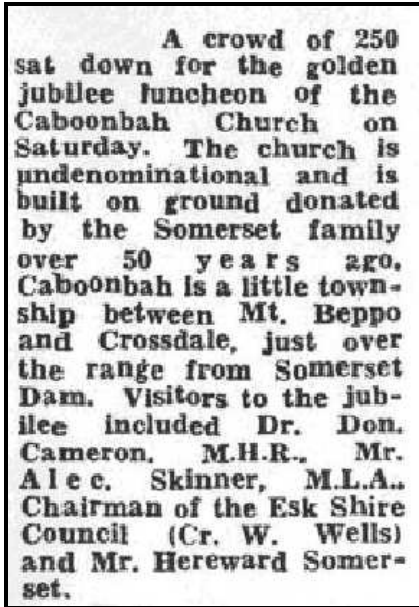
Sadly there were no respondents to this request either.

Fifty years after the little country church had opened its doors to all comers, the Golden Jubilee was an unqualified success. The Treasurer had banked £50/0/3 and the committee had a credit balance of £91/15/8.

The media report following was disappointing and did not acknowledge the enormous effort

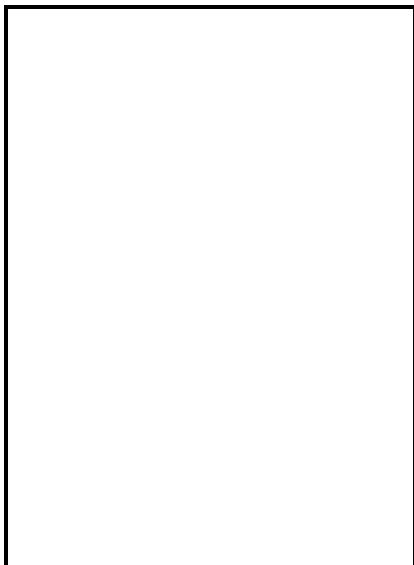
<sup>2</sup> Queensland Times, 3/6/1955

required of a small group of volunteers financially constrained in every way.



From Queensland Times 14/11/1955

The church committee, however, understood how hard particularly the ladies had worked to raise funds for the event, and at their next meeting they established the Caboonbah Undenominational Church Ladies Guild. The inaugural President was Mrs. F. Cannell and the Vice-President was the legendary Mrs. M. Schultz.



Mrs Maggie Schultz, President of Ladies Guild 1956-75

There do not appear to have been regular church services at the Caboonbah Church after 1963. In

spite of this money was found to replace the original shingle roof with an iron one for the Diamond Jubilee celebrated on 6 November 1965. This time the newspaper reports were all that could have been asked for, and the preliminary advertising from Queensland Times<sup>3</sup> is reported in full.

**“SERVICE TO MARK DIAMOND JUBILEE**

*TOOGOOLAWAH, Nov. 1. – One of the oldest churches in the Toogoolawah district, and one with a unique history, is the Caboonbah Undenominational Church, (pictured above) founded in 1905.*

*There will be a commemoration service next Saturday to celebrate the diamond jubilee of this historic church.*

*Mr. Henry Plantagenet Somerset, who owned a property of 5000 acres sandwiched between Cressbrook Station and Mt. Brisbane Station, called Caboonbah (meaning big rock), started the move for a church to be built at Caboonbah.*

*Mr. Somerset had married Miss Katherine Rose McConnel, daughter of D.C. McConnel, one of the founders of Cressbrook Station*

*Before 1905, Mr. Somerset held services every second Sunday, either in the Caboonbah home or neighbours' barns or later in the Lutheran Church at Mt. Beppo. Mr. Somerset took a small organ on a wagonette and Mrs. Somerset played hymns &c.*

*When it was decided to build a church, Mr. & Mrs. Somerset gave the land and standing green timber, which Lars Andersen, sawmiller, of Esk, took in exchange for the necessary seasoned timber. Thus in 1905 the Caboonbah Undenominational church, designed by Mrs. Somerset, was built with the help of many surrounding settlers, who helped finance it. They included Mr. & Mrs. H.P. Somerset, James. Soden, Robert Dawson Soden, Charles Henry Soden, Edward William Soden, David Walker Smith and John Thomas Milner. In addition a mortgage was raised.*

*Mr. Lars Andersen, cabinet maker, builder and sawmiller of Esk, built the church and donated the pulpit and pews.*

**WATER SPORTS HELD**

*To raise funds for the Church Mr. Somerset organised water sports at Caboonbah Cliff, and on a ridge below the cliffs, had stalls,*

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Times 2/11/1965

sports and games, swimming, canoeing, and climbing the greasy pole with pig attached, shooting the bunyip etc.

The shooting of the bunyip was really a stroke of genius on Mr. Somerset's part. The bunyip was mounted on a floating log. It was covered with bullock's hide and a big calf's head on the cliff side. On the right hand side it had a bull's eye as a target and explosive inside. A man in a row boat came quietly past the cliff, no-one watching him. Presently, around the cliff, out in the middle of the river, came the bunyip.

It certainly caused a sensation. Then the shooters lined up, and finally the bunyip was blown to pieces.

Rollo Somerset and his sister Doris (Mrs. A.R. Wait), had found a nest of bandicoots, or some such, and had them displayed as baby bunyips, a penny a peep. This proved great fun and made an amount of 10/-. The day was a great success.

Mrs. Lumley-Hill, of Bellevue Station, helped Mr. Somerset get up a concert at Mt. Beppo School as well. On other occasions balls were held at night in the stable lofts at Caboonbah.

### Simple Services

Mrs. Somerset was organist and Sunday school teacher and Mr. Somerset was also an organist at the Caboonbah church and conducted the Church of England every second month or when the Rector was unable to attend.

Later their daughters, Mrs. J. Turner and Mrs. A.R. Wait were organists.

The name "Undenominational" expressed itself in the Caboonbah church. All church denominations held services on alternate months to cater for the spiritual needs of the pioneers of the area.

The Caboonbah church was run by the president or chairman, secretary and treasurer, and all members of the church, of all denominations, were on the committee. No one church could dominate, and services were kept as simple as possible. Everyone cared for the church and its upkeep.

In the early days everyone came to the church in buggies and sulkies or rode horses. Rev. Mervyn Henderson came from Esk on a bicycle until Mr. Somerset gave him a horse and sulky.

The lovely church, with its shingle roof and verandahs on its eastern and western sides, and with one room set aside for the minister and the other for mothers and babies may be the first of its kind built in Queensland. The church spire is also of unusual pattern.

In the early days the church was the meeting place for all occasions, and a galvanised iron roofed building in the grounds gave shelter to the people who gathered for social meetings and basket picnics.

### Memorial Plaque

Inside the church is a plaque in memory of Mr. & Mrs. H.P. Somerset. Residents of the district all gave to the memorial fund. On the plaque are the words, "To the glory of God, and in remembrance of Henry Plantagenet Somerset and his wife Katherine Rose who founded this church in 1905. 'Write me as one who loved his fellow man.'"

The war intervened, then the rest of the money was spent on a portrait of H.P. Somerset, which was framed by boys at the Rural School, Toogoolawah and a set of encyclopaedia by Alec Chisholm for the Toogoolawah School.

There is a beautiful font in the church in memory of Mr. & Mrs. R.D. Soden sen., also a plaque in memory of Capt. Rollo Somerset.

The crucifix was sent to Caboonbah church from France by a daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Somerset, Miss Chris Somerset.

Marriages solemnised at the church included – John Turner-Mary Somerset 1917, George Sharpe-Joan Somerset 1918, Rollo Somerset-Glory Turner 1925, Eric Wait-Mabel Bright, Lesley Langton-Ruth Soden, Hereward Somerset-Jean Turner 1923.

Some of the people buried in the nearby Caboonbah Cemetery were – Mrs. Katherine Rose Somerset aged 79 years, 1935, and Mr. H.P. Somerset 84 years, 1936, Charles William Henry Rollo Somerset M.C., 1936 and many of the early pioneers of the district including MacPhersons, Camerons, Dumkes, Freeks, Sodens, Brights, Eastells, Watts, Cannels, Waites, Mortimers and Nutzs.

### Preached There

Ministers who preached in the Caboonbah Church were – Church of England: David Morgan Jones 1905-1906, Thomas Ashburner, 1907-1913, Leonard James Hobbs 1909-1914, John Brodie Armstrong 1914-1918, Alfred William Gilbert 1914-1921, Kenneth Arthur Watts 1921-1928, Bertie Stanley Cole 1928-1933, Robert Angus Munro 1933-1938, George Robert Gibson 1936-1938, Percival John Esmund Demuth 1938-191942. Ernest Read Chittenden 192-1945, Reuben Athelstane Foote 1945-1952, David John Thomas Richardson 1952-1958, A.A. Bale 1959-1965, J.J. Tunstall 1965.

Methodist: Rev. James Heaton 1906, Thomas Nock 1907, Robert Bacon 1908-1909,

Herbert A, Denny 1910, T. Leslie Barkla 1911, W. Pascoe Wellington 1912, Horace A. Brown 1913, Richard Whaites 1914, F.H. Brown 1915, H.G. Ford 1915-1916, J.T. Roberts 1917-18, Thomas H. Taylor, 1919-20, A. Everett 1921-22, Sydney Spiers 1923, Thomas Burgess 1924-27, George Holland 1927, Reginald Bye 1928, Mervyn Lee 1929-31, Thomas H. Cherry 1932-34, Clifford L. Williams 1935-36, Ian H. Grimmett 1937-38 (now master of King's College, Brisbane), Neville V. Watson 1939, Ivan S. Hiscock 1940, Ken S. Horton 1941, Basil J. Dale 1942-43, George E. Andrews 1944-45, William N. Morton 1946-49, Allan F. Heiner 1950-52, Allan S. Wilson 1953-55, Charles H. Perry 1956-60, Barry Dangerfield 1961-64, Allan D. Hartshorn 1965.

Presbyterian: W.J. Stevens 1908-11, M. Henderson 1916-23, C.B. Watts 1928-32; from 1934 W. Burgess, J.H. Gowdie, R.M. Crawford, A.B. Brown, T. Gray, G.T. Brown, L.A. Neale, G. Welsh, A. Calvert, G. Baharell, A.B. Innes, A. G. McLaren, J.M. Blacklock, D.F. Roberts, W. Ashton, F.K. Van Der Kley, J.D. Ogden 1963 to 1965.

*The Caboonbah church is set on a hill and looking towards the mountains from all directions the scene is one of tranquillity and unsurpassed beauty, especially when the sun changes the mountain colours to various shades of blue, green and gold."*

By 1978 the financial position of the Caboonbah Church was so perilous that there were serious threats of its permanent closure. The committee members were aging: the Treasurer, Mr Amos Williams had served for 25 years and was now 80 and Maggie Schultz had died. The Church was saved by a bequest from the late Frank Hopkins that allowed it to continue.



Benefactor of Caboonbah Udenominational Church

Since that time the Caboonbah Church has remained available for services of any denomination and its cemetery is still in use. Its committee holds an Annual Service each year in November and it celebrated its centenary in 2005.

As usual, representatives of all the congregations in the Toogoolawah district led portions of the worship. The message was offered, on this occasion, by Archbishop Phillip Aspinall who enjoyed the country fellowship of a basket lunch afterwards.



Archbishop Phillip Aspinall