

THOMAS AND WILLIAM DEACON General Baptists in Queensland

THE DEACONS OF LEICESTERSHIRE

In September 1845, William Thomas Deacon, aged about twenty-one, began studies for the ministry at the General Baptist College, located at that time in Leicester.¹ For seven years he had learnt the saddle and harness-making business, but his gifts for ministry had been noticed by the pastor of Friar Lane Baptist Church where he had been a member about five years. This first General Baptist church in Leicester, dating from 1651, still exists as part of its daughter church, Friar Lane and Braunstone (established 1961).² By this time General Baptists of the New Connexion were developing closer relations with Particular Baptists.

William's father, Thomas, was born in Leytonstone, Essex in 1788, and moved to Leicestershire with his family as a youth, eventually settling in the Billesdon area, about fourteen kilometres east of Leicester, where a church had been established by Friar Lane in 1811.³ Here Thomas married Mary Garfield of Slawston on 6 November 1815. She was baptized at Friar Lane on 17 September 1818 and Thomas a year later on 12 September 1819; they were both transferred when the Billesdon church was constituted as a separate fellowship in 1820. Two children were born in Billesdon, John on 1 October 1817 and Eliza 13 April 1821. Thomas's occupation is not known, but he became a lay preacher with 'much acceptance and considerable success'.⁴

Later the family returned to Leicester and joined the Dover Street church, formed by a group which broke away from Friar Lane in protest against the successor to the Revd John Deacon, pastor 1783-1821. This was a different family of the same name. John's son, Frederick, was one of the breakaway leaders. Thomas and Mary had another son, William Thomas, on 15 February 1824. Around 1840 William was baptized and joined the older church at Friar Lane. From this church he prepared to begin his studies for the ministry.⁵

MINISTRY AT BOURNE

A year or so before William entered college, his father, Thomas, became assistant minister of the General Baptist Church at Bourne, a market town about sixty kilometres east of Leicester near the fens. This church had been established in 1645, probably by Cromwellian soldiers. A meeting house was erected in 1717, and the present building in 1835. Services were held in a number of surrounding villages, including Dyke, Haconby, Kirkby, Castle Bytham, Stainfield and Manthorpe. In 1842 a great effort was made to raise funds for an assistant preacher for this growing work and, on 3 August 1843, the church invited Thomas Deacon 'to labour in the sphere appointed for a period as long as shall be mutually agreeable and that his remuneration be £50 per annum.' He had particular responsibility for 'the

villages, and the Sabbath afternoons at home'.⁶ At Morton, another important local centre, a chapel was erected in 1846 by a determined pioneer, Jane Redmile, and she selected Thomas Deacon as one of the preferred preachers for the opening.⁷

From 1844 the minister at Bourne was the Revd Charles Mills, former schoolmaster and Stepney graduate, who had been at Upwell, Norfolk.⁸ Ill health greatly restricted his ministry at Bourne and he died in London on 25 September 1846 in his mid-30s. Thomas Deacon virtually took over, leading services, visiting, and representing the church at denominational functions.⁹ In 1844 the church reported to the General Baptist Association, '. . . we have regularly enjoyed the zealous and faithful labors of Mr Deacon, who, previous to our pastor's illness, had engaged to conduct one service on the Sabbath, and to preach in the surrounding neighbourhood". When the Revd J.B. Pike, son of 'saintly J.G. Pike' of St Mary's Gate, Derby, was appointed as Mills' successor, serving from 1847 to 1863, Deacon resumed his role as assistant.¹⁰ The church struggled with two stipends and a building debt. Deacon's salary was mentioned as a concern at church gatherings, and the members had to be visited "with the view to meeting the deficiency in Mr Deacon's income." The debt was not cleared until 1852.¹¹

Deacon's wife and two older children disappear from the records; they were apparently dead by 1848 or 1849, perhaps even before Deacon moved to Bourne.¹² The younger son, however, William Thomas the saddler, was known to the Bourne church and preached there on several occasions. When the church heard that he had applied to the Academy, they requested one of their members "earnestly to recommend him to the committee of that institution."¹³ With the support of two churches, William entered into his studies.

In summer 1846, after completing his first year of studies, he supplied the Bourne pulpit through July.¹⁴ A few months later he accepted an interim appointment at Spalding. This was another old church, founded in 1646, sixteen kilometres from Bourne with which it enjoyed close association. As William Deacon later reported, he 'was labouring under a violent cold, attended with hoarseness', but 'I fulfilled my engagement, conducting four or five services during the week besides other engagements, but the result was an inflammation in the throat which for several months threatened my life. Through mercy however I am spared, and with the exception of a little remaining hoarseness I am well and strong.'¹⁵ He had, however, contracted tuberculosis, which terminated his studies and hopes for ministry. He wrote to the college, 'intimating the improbability of his being able ever to engage in the Ministry or resume his studies on account of his health'.¹⁶ Returning to Bourne he lived with his widowed father, who sadly referred to him as 'my only child - my earthly all' and reflected on the 'affliction in the throat brought on by cold and preaching when he ought to have been silent'.¹⁷

WILLIAM DEACON MIGRATES TO AUSTRALIA

A year later, William learned of efforts by the visionary Presbyterian minister from

Sydney, the Revd Dr John Dunmore Lang, to promote an ambitious immigration scheme to Moreton Bay, Sydney.¹⁸ Lang was in Britain publicizing his views, organizing his project and seeking recruits. William Deacon read about the scheme in the *British Banner*, a weekly newspaper used extensively by Lang for promotional purposes. Deacon had noticed that warmer weather seemed good for his voice; physicians agreed that a few years in the warmer climate of Australia should result in a full cure.¹⁹ So on 8 July 1848 he wrote to Lang, 'I have read with peculiar interest your letters on "Australian Emigration" which have recently appeared in the "British Banner" and have resolved after prayerful deliberation to seek in South [*sic*] Australia my future home. My pecuniary resources are very limited and as I fear it would not be possible to secure . . . a free passage I write to ascertain the lowest sum for which I could be conveyed thither in the vessel you purpose dispatching to that country next month. I should much prefer going in that vessel because of the superior moral and religious character of those going out under your superintendence . . . I will only add that since the commencement of my affliction I have been living at the expense of my dear Father who is an assistant Minister at Bourne where I am now residing. His means are very limited and I wish to avoid depriving him of that which in his declining years he may well need himself. As I am unable to speak in public, I purpose following my own business. If therefore under these circumstances you can assist me to get to South Australia at the smallest possible outlay I shall ever feel truly grateful to you.'²⁰

Lang encouraged William. His father, devastated at the prospect of losing his only remaining son, in an expression of profound faith and sympathy with his son's commitment to pursuing the will of God, wrote to Dr Lang, 'Now Sir if he goes I shall commit him to your care, that is for advice and counsel, and I hope with the divine Blessing his life may be prolonged and the desire of his heart granted - that is that he may be able to preach the glorious Gospel of Christ . . . My dear Sir, I write to you as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and rely with confidence upon your word.'²¹

Lang offered a place in his first party of migrants. In preparation, William married Louisa Shenton at the Dover Street church on 15 August. She was twenty-seven, a milliner of more than ten years experience, the eldest of five children born to the late Thomas Shenton, a slater, and his wife Elizabeth of Humberstone Road, Leicester. William may have met her at the Dover Street church, or while at the college nearby.²²

A month later they joined Lang's ship, the *Fortitude*, as it made its way down the Thames to begin its journey to Moreton Bay,²³ with over 200 selected 'industrious and virtuous' emigrants.²⁴ The chaplain was a Baptist, Revd Charles Stewart, recruited by Lang at the last minute to serve on the voyage and to establish a united evangelical church on his arrival. Stewart came from a Scottish Presbyterian family and was educated at the University of Glasgow, but trained for the Baptist ministry at Horton College, near Bradford, supported by the Glasgow Baptist

Educational Association. He was called to Zion Chapel, Newhall Street, Birmingham, but this pastorate came to a traumatic conclusion within two years; he then preached at the new branch of Dudley Baptist Church at Toll End, Tipton.

Stewart read of Lang's migration scheme in the *Banner*. Interested in overseas work and with no ties or immediate prospects in the United Kingdom, he joined the "missionary ship."²⁵ Lang was impressed with his personal and ministerial qualities. Having failed to find a Presbyterian minister to accompany his first migrants, he accepted Stewart as a suitable alternative to lead the "Evangelical Alliance" type of church he had in mind.²⁶ Lang included in the initial group several others accustomed to Christian work to assist in establishing churches and conducting services. As well as William Deacon, there was Joseph Clift, Dr Henry Challinor (the ship's surgeon) and school master, Samuel P. Welsby.²⁷ An eventful four-months journey gave Stewart many opportunities for Christian ministry. Deacon's compassion and initiative also helped in coping with a severe outbreak of fever that claimed several lives.²⁸

Back in England William's father anxiously awaited news of his son. Scanning Lang's column in the *Banner* for any report about the voyage or conditions in the 'far distant land', he became better acquainted with Lang's vision for a strong evangelical presence in Australia to offset the growing influence of 'Popery and Puseyism' in the form of the dominant Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. He clung to Lang's encouraging prediction when the two men met: 'Sir, I have great confidence that the voyage to and climate of Australia will be the means of restoring your son to health and your self will follow him to Australia.' Although turned sixty and of limited means, he knew that if he decided to go, 'there are several [others] that would do the same', including a niece if he could raise the finance for a cabin passage. His admiration for Lang was growing. Setting theological differences aside, he explained, 'I hope we are Brothers in the Covenant of Grace and shall meet in our Father's Kingdom in that Land of pure delight . . . Till then receive my heartfelt gratitude for all the past and my prayer for you is that God will crown your efforts with abundant success - and at last with a Crown of Glory that will never fade away.'²⁹

Deacon met Lang again when he was preparing to leave England after his lengthy visit. Lang was taking with him to Australia a group of men to be trained for the ministry. Writing to him soon after, Deacon compared Lang to the victorious and popular Duke of Wellington, then in the final years of his life, 'Your name will go down to posterity embalmed with the grateful thanks of a people yet unborn which will be more durable than marble and more honourable and glorious than ever fell to the lot of the Hero of Waterloo. The name of that hero is associated with war, blood, war, desolation and death - yours with the happiness and peace and prosperity of your species.' He commended Lang for recruiting potential ministers 'I hope you will have a band of young men whose hearts God has enlightened, convicted and sanctified to go with you to whom you may be very useful in

imparting knowledge to fit and prepare them for extensive usefulness as heralds of the Cross of Christ.³⁰

The *Fortitude* arrived in Moreton Bay on 20 January 1849 to a mixed reception. The help expected from the Government was denied, Lang's land orders were declared invalid and the immigrants were forced to make their own arrangements. Although disappointed, most of these resourceful people rose to the occasion and began to make progress. William Deacon's health was much improved, so he and his wife set up their saddlery and millinery businesses in Brisbane, using the former Wesleyan meeting-house. On a trip to Sydney for supplies, William wrote to his father, describing the journey from England and his current prospects. He had found to his delight some people from Bourne, but above all he reported 'The climate suits me admirably well; my health is good; I never felt better in my life than now. "Bless the Lord, O my soul".' His father sent the letter to the *Banner* where it was published, almost exactly a year after the departure of the *Fortitude*. Lang referred to William Deacon as a shining example of the benefits of his migration scheme.³¹

The Deacons' businesses made steady progress and in mid-1849 they moved to 'the rising town'³² of Ipswich, at the head of river navigation and the entry point to the fertile plains and the Darling Downs behind. It was about sixty-five kilometres from Brisbane and then had a population of less than 800.³³ Here their son, also William Thomas, was born on 10 July 1852. The Deacons bought a cottage³⁴ and joined in the life of the Wesleyan church, which had held occasional services since early 1848. A small chapel was erected a year or so later; William probably served as treasurer of the fund-raising committee.³⁵ He took his place in the public life of the town, serving on the jury, becoming involved in a literary society and in debates over education, supporting petitions against convict labour, requesting the erection of a bridge and seeking the services of the government geologist to assist in the search for gold.³⁶

THOMAS DEACON MIGRATES TO AUSTRALIA

William wrote home, 'Now my dear father I must commend you to God; may He be your support in your declining years. But I am not without hope of seeing you in Australia.'³⁷ Eventually Thomas Deacon decided to join his son.

The Bourne church still had financial difficulties and in April 1850 Thomas advised the members he would resign. By October he was on his way to Australia on the *Tartar* (567 tons), which sailed from Plymouth on 26 October 1850 and arrived in Sydney on 8 February 1851. With him were his niece, fifteen-year-old Eliza Thorpe, and several members of his daughter-in-law's family, encouraged to migrate by Louisa.³⁸ The families were reunited on 1 March 1851 when the *Souvenir* arrived in Brisbane from Sydney. Soon recognized as a 'devout and saintly'³⁹ man, Thomas Deacon settled in Ipswich close to his son, and purchased land in a central location, deriving income from shops there. Louisa's mother remarried, while her brother Samuel married Deacon's niece Eliza, and became a

successful builder and public figure. Louisa's youngest sister, Elizabeth, also married.⁴⁰

Charles Stewart had by this time successfully instituted the United Evangelical Church in Brisbane. Encouraged by Lang to include Ipswich in his charge, he conducted his first service there only a month after arriving in Brisbane. He continued to do so as often as he could, although the journey could be traumatic.⁴¹ Mostly these services were carried on by two other *Fortitude* passengers who had settled there, Dr Henry Challinor and Samuel Welsby. Joseph Clift, an untrained preacher, had been designated by Lang to commence a church in Ipswich, but on the voyage had displayed a poor attitude and clashed with Stewart. He disliked Ipswich and clashed with people there until he left for Sydney where he continued to cause trouble.⁴²

Lang sent a Presbyterian, the Revd Thomas Kingsford of Dumbarton, Scotland, as a replacement minister for Ipswich on his second migrant ship, the *Chaseley* which arrived 1 May 1849. But instead of working with the evangelical congregation, he soon formed a Presbyterian church and then moved to Warwick on the Darling Downs, where he believed the opportunities were greater. The Ipswich Presbyterian Church was re-established when the Revd Dr W.L. Nelson arrived in October 1853.⁴³

Kingsford had probably left by the time Thomas Deacon arrived in Ipswich,⁴⁴ leaving the fiercely sectarian community with no resident Protestant minister. Deacon immediately began leading the evangelical services, first in the Court House and, as numbers grew, in a converted cottage in Nicholas Street. He was pleased to be once again engaged in 'that course of Christian activity which had so conspicuously marked and adorned his previous career.'⁴⁵

FAMILY TRAGEDIES

William's wife gave birth to a daughter on 15 October 1851, but her husband's health had given way again and he died on 27 November. Aged only twenty-eight, this 'talented young man' was "greatly endeared to his family and intimate friends by his social virtues . . . universally respected in the district as an upright tradesman, an independent citizen, a sincere patriot, and thoroughly consistent Christian'.⁴⁶ There is no later reference to the daughter, whose name is unknown, so she probably died too.

Louisa was determined to make the most of her millinery business to help her through. William's 'superior' saddlery stock was taken over by another local tradesman.⁴⁷ In January 1853, Louisa married a local businessman, Samuel Southerden, another *Fortitude* emigrant. He moved his prospering business into her premises, but more sorrow followed.⁴⁸ A daughter, Eliza, born 8 November 1853, lived only five weeks. Another, also Eliza, born 13 March 1855, survived, but the mother died a week after Louisa Jane's birth on 21 August 1856 and that baby soon died. Samuel sold his business after his wife's death; he died suddenly on 14

January 1860. Young William Deacon was cared for by his uncles Samuel Shenton and Thomas Towell.⁴⁹

Meanwhile Thomas Deacon had married Rachel Gosling on 9 February 1853 at the United Evangelical Church in Brisbane. She had come to Queensland after losing her first husband.⁵⁰ Within a few weeks of his second marriage, a new chapter was opening in Thomas Deacon's ministerial life and Rachel proved a strong support.

THE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Christian witness in Ipswich had been enhanced a few weeks after Thomas Deacon's arrival by the appointment of a Wesleyan minister, the Revd John G. Millard, but he was often away, itinerating in the vast country area, and soon moved to Brisbane, only visiting Ipswich occasionally.⁵¹ The Presbyterians had been without leadership for some time, although by 1853 were hoping to have a new minister and erect a building.⁵² The evangelical services led by Deacon, supported by Congregationalists and Baptists, developed to the point where it was possible to consider the formal establishment of a church, preferably linked with another church or missionary society.

The nearest Baptist church was at Bathurst Street, Sydney, but its minister, the Revd John Ham, had died after a long illness and the intended successor, the Revd W.H. Carey from Parramatta, who had come to New South Wales as a student in Dr Lang's ministerial training scheme,⁵³ died suddenly in his early twenties. The church sought help from England where a committee acting on the church's behalf selected the Revd James Voller of Princes End, Tipton, but a shipwreck delayed his arrival until January 1854. A Baptist Church was not established in Brisbane until August 1855.⁵⁴ So there was no help to be gained from the Baptists. At Deacon's suggestion, an approach was made to the Congregational Colonial Missionary Society in Sydney for a minister, but evoked no interest or help.⁵⁵

So Deacon, despite his age, agreed to be "confirmed" as official pastor when the church was formed on 17 March 1853. There were twelve foundation members, including the Deacons, Dr and Mrs Challinor, Samuel Welsby, Louisa Deacon/Southerden, and Eliza Shenton; Challinor and Welsby were appointed the first deacons. It was a Union church, comprising both Baptists and Congregationalists, although known as the United Congregational Church of Ipswich. As the main purpose was the 'promotion of Christian fellowship among its members and the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom', it was agreed that 'the subjects of Infant and Adult Baptism shall not be introduced into the Pulpit or pressed upon the attention of anxious enquirers after Salvation who are unconnected with the members of the Church or any other means employed for the purpose of making Baptists, Independents or Independents Baptists.'⁵⁶ It was akin to Stewart's United Evangelical Church in Brisbane, but the prospects were more limited due to the smaller population and the absence of Presbyterians in its constituency. It has survived for almost 150 years, first as part of the Congregational Union and then in

the Uniting Church in Australia, whereas Stewart's church had a life of only about seven years, after which it separated into three denominations.

Despite deep commitment and enthusiastic acceptance by the people, Deacon could not hope to lead the church for long, so he initiated another approach to the Congregational Mission. The Colonial Missionary Society (CMS) in London had already become aware of the opportunities at Ipswich as "a promising Station for a Minister"⁵⁷ About the same time as the United Congregational Church was being established, the Mission appointed the Revd Edward Griffith of Wiveliscombe, Somerset, to work in Ipswich, although he could not make the journey immediately. He arrived in Ipswich to preach his first sermon on 12 March 1854.

Meanwhile, Deacon, with 'characteristic grace', indicated he would stand aside as soon as a replacement arrived.⁵⁸ At the end of the month, the church moved "That as the present pastor, Rev. Thomas Deacon, has this evening signified his intention to resign the pastorate after next Lord's Day, this church unanimously presents a call to Rev. Edward Griffith, Independent minister to become the pastor thereof."⁵⁹ Since 'under God, [Deacon's] own grace and service had so largely been used to call [the church] into being', they moved that the 'cordial thanks of church be presented to the Rev. Thos Deacon for the fidelity and affection with which he discharged his pastoral functions and for the very excellent spirit he has manifested in everything connected with the call of the Rev E. Griffith.'⁶⁰

The church was restructured as Congregational but, because the new title was explicitly intended to indicate a form of church government rather than a doctrinal position, it was agreed that "all members forming its fellowship, whether Baptists or Independents, shall enjoy equal privileges."⁶¹ The church prospered under Griffith's ministry, additional preaching stations were established and a new chapel was opened in Brisbane St on 11 March 1855.⁶² Griffith moved to Maitland, NSW, in July 1856, returning to Queensland to become the second minister of the Wharf Street Church in Brisbane in 1860, and serving with distinction until 1889.⁶³

'RETIREMENT'

In his "retirement", Deacon continued his dedicated involvement in the church and the community. He served on the building committee of the Congregational Church, and undertook occasional pastoral duties. He conducted the first service in the United Evangelical Chapel in Brisbane after the departure of Stewart in January 1855 and took an active interest in the work of the chapel at the German mission station. When a Baptist church began in Brisbane in 1855, he gave it all the support he could. He accepted appointment as local registrar of marriages;⁶⁴ he was also active in interchurch groups such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, supported a meeting to raise funds for Crimean war widows and orphans, and was a generous contributor to the charitable work of the Brisbane Hospital. He even had contact with the law when his home was broken into and nearly burned one night while he was at church, and a large sum of money was stolen. He was witness to the escape

of a convict on board a river boat returning to Ipswich; his testimony exonerated the unfortunate constable whom the prisoner had outwitted.⁶⁵

Thomas and Rachel Deacon remained members of the United Congregational Church until August 1859 when a final opportunity for ministry occurred. At last, in his old age, he was able to pioneer a church 'maintaining and enforcing those specific and distinctive New Testament teachings' he held as a Baptist.⁶⁶

BAPTIST PIONEER

Earlier that year the newly appointed minister of the Brisbane Baptist Church, Revd B.G. Wilson, travelled through Ipswich to the Darling Downs with one of his deacons, Thomas B. Stevens, surveying prospects for establishing Baptist churches. They visited Deacon and found him eager to advance the cause personally and willing to make his own home available for the purpose.⁶⁷ Soon after, the Revd James Voller of Bathurst Street Baptist Church, Sydney, learned that two of his members, Edmund Gregory and Josiah T. Hinton (son of the Revd J.H. Hinton of Devonshire Square Church, London) were planning to move to Ipswich. Familiar with the situation from his visits to Moreton Bay and always looking for new outreach opportunities, Voller encouraged them to commence a Baptist church in their new place of residence. Their arrival in Ipswich at the end of May presented the opportunity for services to begin.⁶⁸

An initial meeting was held on 23 June 1859 and at the first service on the following Sunday, 26 June, 1859, the Revd B.G. Wilson preached from Matthew 17:4 and John 1:35-39. The next Sunday Deacon preached from Psalm 20:5 and Matthew 13:31-32. Deacon's home was used until a disused bowling alley, probably in Brisbane Street opposite West Street, was rented for the purpose.⁶⁹ In January 1860, the church was formally constituted with seven members, including the Deacons, Mr and Mrs Gregory, Thomas Woolley and Josiah Hinton; Thomas Deacon was appointed pastor without salary, assisted by William Swain Roberts, formerly of the Belvoir Street Church in Leicester, a recent arrival from Rockhampton in central Queensland.⁷⁰ When the bowling alley was no longer available, Deacon offered part of his garden in West Street as a chapel site and arranged to leave some of his property as a bequest for the church.⁷¹ With this and continued acts of generosity on Deacon's part, a small chapel costing £200 was quickly erected and opened on Sunday, 26 August 1860, with Voller, Wilson and local ministers participating.

A tea meeting the following Tuesday was attended by a large crowd of well-wishers, but Deacon, having seen his long-held hope of a Baptist church in Ipswich come to fruition, died early on the following morning. He was seventy-two and, as an obituary in the *Ipswich Herald* stated, a "venerable and valuable member of the community." Despite bad weather, a large number attended the funeral of one universally respected as 'a Christian, a friend, and a citizen, who has left the world the better for his having lived in it.'⁷² S.P. Welsby, now a grazier, was appointed

an executor, and Dr Henry Challinor was singled out for special mention in his will, in appreciation 'for his kindness to me in times of affliction.'⁷³ The church recorded its appreciation for Deacon, acknowledging "high respect for his piety, his labours, and his life amongst us" and noted that "under the blessing of God he had been in a very large degree instrumental in gathering this Church, and by his gracious gifts mainly contributed to the erection of this building for their worship." It concluded, "the Church would express their deep sympathy with his widow and earnestly pray she may be sustained and guided and blessed by the great Head of the Church."⁷⁴

A year later, Rachel Deacon had to be disciplined by the church for "immoderate use of intoxicating liquor"; possibly she had difficulty coping with her bereavement. Her membership was transferred to the Brisbane church - perhaps a generous and kindly act of its pastor, the Revd B.G. Wilson, who could thereby offer her greater support.⁷⁵ She was transferred back to Ipswich in June 1864 and married Abraham Phelps of Walloon, near Ipswich, on 21 November 1865. She outlived her third husband, and died on 27 November 1887 at the age of eighty-four, in fellowship with the church, after having generously relinquished her interest in the property which Thomas Deacon had made available to the church.⁷⁶

Thomas Deacon's orphaned grandson, William Thomas, was brought up by his grandfather and two uncles, the builder and architect, Samuel Shenton, and Ipswich Telegraph Director, Thomas Towell. Young William worked in many parts of Queensland with the Posts and Telegraphs Department before setting up business in Ipswich. He entered public life as an alderman and became the first locally born mayor of Ipswich in 1896, and again in 1908. He served with the Fourth (Queensland Imperial Bushmen) Contingent in the South African War, 1900-01, having been recruiting officer in Ipswich and Captain of the Ipswich Mounted Rifles. He assumed command of the battalion on 19 November 1900 when his superior was invalided home. Twice mentioned in despatches, he won the Queen's Medal, reached the rank of Lt Colonel and was awarded the Companion of the Bath on 19 April 1901. He was given a hero's welcome when he returned to his business and public life in Ipswich. He married twice, having three daughters and a son, Lt Shenton Deacon, who was killed while training for the front during World War I. W.T. Deacon died on 4 May 1916 and his funeral was attended by numerous civic and business people, as befitted a successful and popular local citizen.⁷⁷

The original church building on Thomas Deacon's land continued in use until 1875. On 17 June 1877 a new building was opened on a nearby site in Limestone Street. This has undergone alteration but remains the oldest Baptist building still in use in Queensland.⁷⁸ The church, which a later pastor and denominational historian proudly claimed as "the first Baptist church in Queensland"⁷⁹ struggled for some years with a rapid turnover of pastors and fluctuations in membership, but grew to be a strong and influential fellowship in one of the state's largest and most important industrial cities.

Thomas Deacon, its founder, was the second Baptist minister to work in Queensland; unlike the first, Charles Stewart, he eventually served in a Baptist church. He was almost sixty years of age before he began his formal ministry, and lived in Queensland for less than a decade. This 'gentle old man of marvellous sweetness of character, and richness of grace'⁸⁰ was the only General Baptist minister ever to serve in Queensland. Although the church he founded later declined to follow formally in that tradition, the denomination as a whole reflected many of its characteristics.⁸¹ Despite personal tragedies, this small family has left a legacy of service, devotion and piety that is hard to match.⁸²

NOTES

The author would welcome any further information, especially in relation to personal connections. He can be contacted at 17 Disraeli St, Indooroopilly 4068, Qld, Australia, e-mail:

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- 1 A.C. Carter, *A Popular Sketch of the Midland Baptist College*, gives its dates and places as: London 1797-1813; Wisbech 1813-1837; Loughborough and London 1838-1843; Leicester 1843-1857; Nottingham, Sherwood Rise 1857-1862; Chilwell 1862-1883; Nottingham, Forest Road 1883-1920. General Baptist Education Society, Annual Committee Meeting June 25, 1845, minutes under Applications for admission, no. 3, 'Mr. Wm. Thos. Deacon' (Information from Mrs Susan Mills, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, 30 March 1998).
- 2 The minister 1783-1821 was John Deacon (1757-1821), whose half-brother was Samuel Deacon Jr (1740-1816), the leading clockmaker in Leicestershire; their father Samuel Deacon (1714-1812), was one of the founders of the New Connexion of General Baptists. (J.H.Y. Briggs, 'Deacon, Samuel', *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, 1992, vol.1:304. John Daniell, *Leicestershire Clockmakers: directory of watch and clock makers working in Leicestershire before 1900*, (Leicestershire Museums, 1975) pp.8-12; P.A. Hewitt, 'The Deacon Family of Leicestershire, Clockmakers', reprinted from *Antiquarian Horology* (Antiquarian Horological Society) 2nd printing with additions and corrections, September-December 1986 and January 1987. There is no evidence of any relationship between this family and the subjects of this paper, although there may have been family links encouraging Thomas Deacon to move from Essex to Leicester.
- 3 Thomas Deacon was described in the Slawston Marriage Register as 'a bachelor of the parish of Cranoe' (the neighbouring village). A surviving chapel was erected at Billesdon in 1813 (Graham Lee, Leicester, 23 June 1998).
- 4 *Jubilee of the Ipswich Baptists Record Volume 1859-1909* (Ipswich, 1909), p.10.
- 5 Friar Lane Church Book, 8 June 1845: 'Having heard our young friends Samuel Ashby and Thomas W. Deacon [*sic*] preach several times, we beg to recommend them as suitable and proper persons to enjoy the advantages of our Academical Institution.' His application for baptism and membership was processed 23 March 1840, 22 April 1840 and 18 May 1840. The minutes of the General Baptist Education Society (GBES), Annual Committee Meeting 25 June 1845 seem to indicate Deacon came from Archdeacon Lane church, but this is incorrect.
- 6 Bourne Baptist Church, minutes (notes supplied by Mrs Joy Read, Bourne). See also F.J. Mason, 'The Old Minute Book of Bourne Baptist Church', Minutes of the New Connexion of General Baptists, 1843, 1844, *BQ* 15/1953-4, pp.226-8 (S. Mills, Regent's Park College Library, Oxford, 24 March 1998).
- 7 *Souvenir Programme, Centenary Celebrations Morton Baptist Church*, 1946.
- 8 *Baptist Manual* 1847, pp.4-5, obituary: Revd Charles Mills. Some lists show Mills as commencing in 1842. ('Memoir to the Late Rev. J. Peggs', *General Baptist Repository*, 1850, p.541f).
- 9 *Baptist Magazine*, 1847, p.712; Bourne Baptist Church, Minutes, 25 June 1846, 3 February 1848.
- 10 Minutes of the New Connexion of General Baptists, 1844. The statement in *Jubilee of the*

- Ipswich Baptists Record Volume 1859-1909*, p.10, that he assisted 'the saintly Rev J.G. Pike - a great name in Baptist annals' is incorrect, confusing the date and the son for the father. J.E. White, *The Ipswich Baptists* (Ipswich 1984, p.24) gives the name as J.A. Pike and follows a local municipal history in erroneously identifying the location as Bournemouth. For Revd J.G. Pike (1784-1854), a leading advocate of missions and pastor of St Mary's Gate, Derby, see *Baptist Manual*, 1855, pp.53f, and *A Memoir and Remains of the late Rev. John Gregory Pike*, edited by his sons John Baxter and James Carey Pike (1855). He had family links with both Friar Lane and Dover Street church and was present at the opening of the Bourne Church in 1835; his last visit to Bourne in 1852 is recorded in *Memoir*, p.361. (*Souvenir of the Bourne Baptist Church Tercentenary 1645-1945*). A great-grandson of Revd J.G. Pike, Robert J.G. Pike, is currently a resident of Brisbane, Qld, and a member of Annerley Baptist Church.
- 11 Bourne Baptist Church, Minutes, 5 December 1845: 'That Mrs Whyles and Mrs Howe call upon all the members with the view to meeting the deficiency in Mr Deacon's income.' See also 30 October 1845, 'That the subject of Mr Deacon's income be entered into and considered.'
 - 12 There is no mention of them in Thomas Deacon's will, 31 July 1860.
 - 13 Bourne Baptist Church, Minutes, 3 April 1845.
 - 14 Bourne Baptist Church, Minutes, 25 June 1846.
 - 15 W.T. Deacon to J.D. Lang, 8 July 1848 (National Library of Australia NLA MS 3267 Box 4). Mills also became ill after preaching at Spalding. (*Baptist Manual*, 1847, p.45).
 - 16 GBES Minutes, 7 November 1848.
 - 17 Thomas Deacon to J.D. Lang, 13 July 1848 (NLA, MS 3267 Box 5).
 - 18 See D.W.A. Baker, *Days of Wrath: a Life of John Dunmore Lang* (Melbourne 1985) chaps 16-18 for full details.
 - 19 W.T. Deacon to J.D. Lang, 8 July 1848; *British Banner*, 15, 22 March, 12 April, 21 June, and especially 28 June 1848.
 - 20 W.T. Deacon to J.D. Lang, 8 July 1848.
 - 21 Thomas Deacon to J.D. Lang, 13 July 1848.
 - 22 *Moreton Bay Courier* (MBC) 21 February 1849; Letter: Thomas Deacon to Lang, 13 July 1848: 'If he goes it is my wish that he should have a companion with him - to this I presume you would not object.' I am indebted to Graham Lec, Leicester for the suggestion about how Deacon and Shenton met, and for local and personal information about the Deacons and the Shentons.
 - 23 See Samuel Pearson Welsby, *Voyage of the "Fortitude" from England to Brisbane, Queensland 1848-1849: the diary of Samuel Pearson Welsby* (John Oxley Library, Brisbane). *British Banner*, 13 September 1848.
 - 24 John Dunmore Lang, *Narrative of the Steps Taken in Promoting the Separation of Queensland from New South Wales* (Sydney: J.G. O'Connor, 1875) p.7.
 - 25 *British Banner* 28 June 1848.
 - 26 *British Banner* 2 August 1848; for detailed treatment of this church and Stewart, see David Parker, *Strange Bedfellows: Rev. Charles Stewart Brisbane's First Baptist Minister and the United Evangelical Church* (Brisbane, 1998); David Parker, 'Tragedy and Hope: a study of two pioneer colonial pastors' (*BQ* 38/April 1999).
 - 27 MBC 27 January 1849 (letter from J.D. Lang dated 11 September 1848); Henry Challinor (1814-1882) *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) 3:373.
 - 28 W.T. Deacon described the journey in a letter to his father, 20 March 1849, published in *British Banner* 12 September 1849. For a further description, including references to Stewart's preaching, see, Welsby, *Voyage of the "Fortitude"*.
 - 29 Thomas Deacon to J.D. Lang, 19 March 1849 (NLA MS 3267 Box 5).
 - 30 W.T. Deacon to J.D. Lang, 23 October 1849. Lang set out his plans for this in *British Banner* 25 September 1849. This group sailed on 16 November 1849 with Lang in *Clifton*. The group included W.H. Carey and S. Whitehead.
 - 31 W.T. Deacon to T. Deacon 20 March 1849; MBC 2 March 1850 letter from J.D. Lang in Glasgow dated 8 October 1849, re-published from *British Banner* 10 October 1849.
 - 32 J.D. Lang, *Cookland in North-eastern Australia* (1847) p.113.
 - 33 MBC 16 June 1849. 1846 Census: population 103; 1851: 932. (*NSW Government Gazette* 1846; *NSW Votes and Proceedings* 2(1851)).
 - 34 MBC 4 May 1850; additional land purchases of almost two acres by Deacon are listed in MBC 12 July 1851 and 20 September 1851. Maps of Ipswich show his name on Section 6 Lot 10 in EllenboroughSt and lots 13 and 14 in section 15 on the corner of Waghorn Street in Darling St.

- His total expenditure was £18/8/0 (Queensland State Archives sur/4 2/70/3, 2/74/7).
- 35 MBC 4 August 1849, 1 June 1850.
- 36 MBC 5 October 1850, 3 August 1850, 21 September 1850, 29 June 1850, 23 August 1851 (this could be Thomas Deacon); NSW Colonial Secretary Correspondence 16 August 1849, 17 August 1849 (JOL Microfilm A.2:20:11, A.2:18:750).
- 37 *British Banner* 12 September 1849.
- 38 *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 February 1851 *Queensland Times* 18 July 1894 (obit. Eliza Shenton); Bourne Baptist Church, Minutes 4 April 1850, 2 May 1850; 1 August 1850: "The subject of Mr Deacon's resignation was returned and after a long conversation in which the pecuniary difficulty of retaining his services was principally dwelt upon, it was agreed that he be requested to stay--seven only voting for the motion." The Roll book records against his name: "Went to Australia, October 1850."
- 39 MBC 3 March 1851; 12 July 1851 (land purchase in West Street of 3r 26p); for a plan of the blocks in West St, see White, *Ipswich Baptists* p.36; K.T. Cameron, "Ipswich in the Eighteen Fifties" *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 6(1959-60) pp.445, 447; this paper is dependent on the reminiscences of Thomas Mathewson who, according to G. Lindsay Lockley, "The foundation, development, and influence of Congregationalism in Australia with emphasis on the nineteenth century" (PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1966) p.8, was at the service of induction for Deacon's successor at the United Congregational Church.
- 40 Louisa's mother (nee Elizabeth Adkin) married George Adkin, a *Fortitude* migrant (MBC 20 November 1852); Elizabeth Shenton married T. Robinson. (MBC 23 August 1856) Samuel Shenton (1829-93) became a prominent builder, architect and public figure in Ipswich, serving as Mayor 1871 and 1889. (W. Frederic Morrison, *The Aldine History of Queensland* (Sydney: Aldine Pub. Co., 1888) pp.526-528; Donald Watson and Judith Mackay, *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century* (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1994) pp.159f).
- 41 MBC 10 March 1849, 17 March 1849, 24 March 1849, 7 April 1849, 4 May 1850. He was lost two nights in the bush on one trip (MBC 21 April 1849) and narrowly escaped injury in a coach accident (Stewart to Mrs J.D. Lang, 4 March 1853, Mitchell Library A2225).
- 42 Parker, *Strange Bedfellows*, p.10; correspondence between Stewart and Ham, 1 May 1849, 2 June 1849, 9 July 1849 and 20 July 1849 (Mitchell Library MS 3240 Central Baptist Church MLK 241) Hubert Watkin-Smith, *Baptists in the Cradle City: The Story of Parramatta Baptist Church 1838-1986* (Sydney, 1986), pp.22, 109).
- 43 *British Banner*, 17 October 1849; Kingsford to B. Quaife, 19 October 1852 (NLA MS 3267 JAF 158/351 Box 1); Richard Bardon, *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland 1849-1859* (Brisbane, 1949) pp.23-4.
- 44 Bardon, *Centenary History*, p.23 puts Kingsford's arrival in Warwick during 1851; in his letter to Rev. B. Quaife (19 October 1852 NLA MS 3267 Box 1 JAF 158/351) Kingsford states that he has been there for "some time", and in his letter to Lang 14 August 1854 (Mitchell Library ML A2234) he indicates that the Anglican minister, Benjamin Glennie was already there; Glennie's diary shows he moved in late July 1850. (Benjamin Glennie diary 1848-60, Anglican Archives, Brisbane; ADB 4/255) Thus Kingsford's departure could be early or mid 1851 at latest, about the time of Deacon's arrival.
- 45 MBC 9 July 1853, 1 September 1860 *Jubilee*, p.10; George Wight, *Congregational Independency: its introduction to Queensland with reminiscences of the churches and photographs of pioneers* (Brisbane, 1887) p.124; the first service was conducted by Revd C. Stewart and then Deacon continued.
- 46 MBC 6 December 1851 (W.T. Deacon's death notice including a brief obituary was printed adjacent to the birth notice!); White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.24; *Jubilee* p.10 dates the death erroneously to 1853.
- 47 MBC 6 December 1851, 31 January 1852.
- 48 MBC 15 January 1853; Cameron, "Ipswich in the Eighteen Fifties", p.446; Samuel Southerden was one of 11 children of a family from St Peter, Isle of Thanet, Kent, connected with Eythorne Baptist Church. Four of the children came to Queensland on the *Fortitude*; of these, Edward Barton Southerden succeeded in business; a fifth, William, later joined Edward in business, before moving to Maryborough. The eldest daughter, Sarah, was married to Richard Ash Kingsford, the prominent Baptist businessman and politician (no relation to Revd T. Kingsford). Their mother may have been

- related to Louisa Deacon. (Mrs T.F. Hughes & Mrs H.L. Henderson, "The History of the Southerden Family" (Queensland Women's Historical Assoc., 1960; this article has several inaccuracies), ADB 5:31).
- 49 MBC 12 November 1853, 24 December 1853, 24 March 1855, 23 August 1856, 6 September 1856; *Queensland Times*, 19 October 1987 (information supplied by Ipswich City Council Cultural Heritage Officer 12 October 1998); Cameron, "Ipswich in the Eighteen Fifties", p.446. Shenton lived next door to Thomas Deacon; Towell was also a passenger on *Fortitude*, but family links with William and Louisa Deacon are not known. A "Mrs Eliza Towell" became a member of Ipswich Baptist Church in June 1860 (White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.22). Thomas' brother Robert and his wife Jane were passengers on the *Chaseley*. (Wills QSA 4990, 5094 m/c Z144, 145).
- 50 MBC 12 February 1853. Daughter of Thomas Adkin, she had been married to Jeremiah (or Thomas) Gosling of Stowmarket, Suffolk. The Deacon-Gosling marriage is the fifth in the UEC marriage register. (John Oxley Library, mf 929.3944, 5021; *Queensland Baptist* December 1887 pp.13). Probably related to Louisa Deacon, whose mother's maiden name was Adkin.
- 51 R.S.C. Dingle (ed), *Annals of Achievement: a Review of Queensland Methodism 1847-1947* (Brisbane: 1947) p.39; he specifically mentions Deacon and Challinor as associates.
- 52 MBC 8 October 1853 see Bardon, *Centenary History*, p.24.
- 53 Baker, *Days of Wrath*, p.288; MBC 30 March 1850 lists all the names.
- 54 David Parker, *James Voller: Pioneer Baptist Minister of Australia* (Brisbane: 1997); K.R. Manley, *In the Heart of Sydney: Central Baptist Church, 1836-1986* (Sydney: 1987) pp.33-37.
- 55 MBC 26 August 1854.
- 56 George Wight, *Congregational Independency*, p.125; United Congregational Church 17 March, 1853 (John Oxley Library 1803 B 9 Bay 3 Shelf 2, 8/67 Minutes 1853-54). White (*Ipswich Baptists*, p.12) claims that Congregationalists dominated the church. Patrick O'Leary argues that from the beginning it was a simply a Congregational Church with a Baptist pastor (who was the only Baptist member) ("Queensland Baptists: the development of Baptist evangelicalism 1846-1926", MA Thesis, University of Queensland, 1991, p.58). But Lockley, "Congregationalism", p.9, argues that union schemes were common enough and usually successful - when Baptists were not the dominant partner!
- 57 Lockley "Congregationalism", p.7, quoting Colonial Missionary Society Minutes, 19 December 1852, although a report in MBC 26 August 1854 says Deacon suggested approaching the CMS; Wight, *Congregational Independency*, p.127, cites the minutes of the Ipswich Church, 6 January 1854 authorising contact with the CMS.
- 58 White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.25.
- 59 United Congregational Church, Minutes, 31 March 1854.
- 60 United Congregational Church, Minutes, 6 April 1854.
- 61 United Congregational Church, Minutes 2 June 1854; Wight, *Congregational Independency*, p.128. According to some, the Baptists were "scattered" (David Parker (ed), *The Gregory History of Queensland Baptists* (Brisbane: 1995) p.16, *Jubilee*, p.8) but O'Leary, "Queensland Baptists", p.58, claims that all the Baptists can be accounted for. Probably some did disperse, while Deacon would remain active even if circumstances were not ideal. Several remained with the Congregational church until the Baptist Church was formed.
- 62 MBC 3 March 1855.
- 63 For Rev. E. Griffith, see *Brisbane Courier* 26 September 1891; ADB 9:112. He was the father of Sir Samuel Walker Griffith (1845-1920), Premier of Queensland 1883-88, 1890-93 and first Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia 1903-19.
- 64 Ipswich Congregational Church minutes, 24/4/54; MBC 23 September 1854, 6 January 1855, 13 October 1855, 8 December 1855, 26 March 1859, 6, 20 August 1859, 31 January 1857 (civil registration of births, deaths and marriages had been introduced in 1855).
- 65 MBC 3 March 1855, 12 January 1856; his son, William, had pressed charges when defrauded by a customer (MBC 15 March 1851, 26 June 1851).
- 66 MBC 1 September 1860; Ipswich Congregational Church Minutes, 5 August 1859.
- 67 MBC 1 September 1860; On B.G. Wilson, *Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (ADEB) p.408, T.B. Stephens, ADB 6:196; ADEB p.354, and Melvin Williams, *Cameos of Baptist Men in 19th Century Queensland* (Brisbane: 1995) pp.11-14.
- 68 MBC 25 May 1859; both were to make

- significant contributions to the Baptist cause. After working with Gregory on the *Ipswich Herald* (est. 1859 - later *Queensland Times*), Hinton was the first pastor ordained in Queensland and pioneered work at Maryborough and Rockhampton; he also served in New Zealand. Gregory, prominent in public life through the printing industry, wrote the first full history of Queensland Baptists (see David Parker (ed), *The Gregory History of Queensland Baptists* (Brisbane: 1995).
- 69 MBC 1 September 1860; White, *Ipswich Baptists*, pp.31-3, 39f.
- 70 Parker, *Gregory History*, p.17. Letter, Graham Lee, Leicester, 7 September 1997. Roberts later moved to Maryborough and, like several Queensland Baptists, became involved with newspapers. (See Rod Kirkpatrick, *Sworn to No Master: a History of the Provincial Press in Queensland to 1930* (Toowoomba: 1984) pp.15, 19f, 21f, 32f, 42f, 55f, 103f.
- 71 White, *Ipswich Baptists*, pp.36f, 42; MBC 21 May 1860. A newspaper report (repeated in church histories) stated that T. Deacon "offered part of his own garden on which to erect a chapel - besides giving the whole of it, with the house in which he resides, as a bequest for the prospective advantage of the church" (MBC 1 September 1860), but by Deacon's will of 31 July 1860, the church would only receive £100 from the sale of one of two blocks if his grandson died before he was 21 and his wife was already dead. Mrs Deacon was to receive the rents for life but, after her third marriage, she gave up her interests.
- 72 Reprinted in MBC 1 September 1860; Rev. B.G. Wilson conducted the funeral and the undertaker was Samuel Shenton (White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.28). Mathewson reported that it was believed Deacon "had lived for over twenty years with only one lung." (Cameron, "Ipswich in the Eighteen Fifties",.447.)
- 73 Will of Thomas Deacon, 31 July 1860, QSA m/f Z50/74; others named in the will included Deacon's grandson, W.T. Deacon, sister Eliza Smith, niece Eliza Shenton, nephews John Capen, Thomas Smith, John Deacon Newton, and Elizabeth Southerden. Capen is also mentioned in Samuel Shenton's will (QSA S 7811 m/f Z183) as a solicitor's clerk of Ripley, Derbyshire; Smith of Spencer's Wood, Reading, is mentioned in Eliza Shenton's will (QSA S 8519 m/f Z 193) as her only cousin.
- 74 White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.25.
- 75 Ipswich Baptist Church Minutes, 22 February, 17 April and 15 May 1861, 3 January 1862.
- 76 *Queensland Baptist* December 1887, p.13; White, *Ipswich Baptists*, pp.38, 42; Ipswich Baptist Church Minutes 28 February 1872. She was willing "to yield all her right and interest in the property known as the Baptist chapel, together with the house and garden adjoining, in favour of the trustees, on condition of their investing the same in trust for the use of the Baptist Church in Ipswich." This enabled the church to improve its property. Trustees included R.A. Kingsford, related by marriage to Louisa Deacon.
- 77 P.L. Murray (editor), *Records of Australia Contingents to the War in South Africa 1899-1902* (Melbourne : Government Printer, 1911; reprinted 1982) p.476; supplied by Margaret Lewis, Australian War Memorial, Canberra. ACT , 30 September 1998; *Ipswich Times* 6 May 1916; 19 Oct, 1987 (information supplied by Ipswich City Council Cultural Heritage Officer 12 October 1998). Robyn Buchanan, *Ipswich Remembers: Military Heritage of Ipswich from the 1860s to the 1990s* (Ipswich: Ipswich City Council & Australia Remembers Committee, 1990) p.5.
- 78 White, *Ipswich Baptists*, pp.37, 46-47.
- 79 White, *Ipswich Baptists*, p.17f. The church was formed within the 'Queensland' period: separation from NSW was signed by Queen Victoria on 6 June 1859 and proclaimed in Brisbane on 10 December 1859.
- 80 Parker, *Gregory History*, p.16.
- 81 See Manley, *In the Heart of Sydney*, p.43, citing Voller's report, *Freeman* 23 December 1857; also *Freeman*, 24 April, 10 July 1868. White (*Ipswich Baptists*, p.109f) refers to an 1872 dispute in the Ipswich church when the secretary, Thomas Woolley, resigned when members objected to him referring to it as a "General Baptist" church.
- 82 Thanks is expressed to Graham Lee, Leicester and Rosemary Kopitke, Brisbane for extensive assistance with personal and family details from census, family history, cemetery records etc used in this paper. Dr Pat Godman of Canberra assisted in obtaining material and information from the National Library of Australia.