

The Baptist Church

Malcolm Nicholson and Reg W. Escott

The story of the Taroona Baptist Church has its origins in the Sandy Bay Baptist Church, which was founded in 1928 on a site purchased from the Church of England seven years earlier.

In 1929 Les and Florie Escott were the earliest recorded baptisms at Sandy Bay. Four years later they moved to Taroona and in 1936 Les Escott began the nondenominational Union Sunday School at the Old Taroona Public Hall on the corner of the Channel Highway and Taroona Crescent.

He was assisted by teachers from the Church of England and Methodist churches.

Reg Dine became the new pastor of the Sandy Bay Baptist Church in 1940. In 1942 he was invited by Les Escott to conduct fortnightly Baptist services on Sunday evenings at the Taroona Public Hall. These services had an average attendance in the low twenties. At the same time weekly prayer meetings and Bible studies were held in the Escott home.

At the end of 1945 the Union Sunday School had to close because of a lack of

teachers. In 1946 the Deacons at Sandy Bay moved that a block of land be purchased as the site of a future Taroona church. In July they invited Les Escott to conduct a Baptist Sunday School at the Taroona Public Hall. This commenced in December 1946, with thirty pupils enrolled.

In 1948 a block of land, which was intended to be the church site, was purchased in Coolamon road, but was later resold. The land for the church's actual site, on the Channel Highway, was donated by Les Escott in 1951.

In 1952 the Taroona Baptist Fellowship was formed, with Max Kingdom, who had become the new pastor of Sandy Bay in 1949, as Chairman. Jack Farmilo was the Vice-Chairman and Les Escott the Secretary.

The church building, which had been designed by J. Bloomer, was constructed in 1953. Most of the building was accomplished by voluntary labour organised by Jack Farmilo. Other builders included Hal Williams, Bill Wheatley, Des Farmilo and Les Escott.

The opening service was conducted on the 2nd May 1953 by H.B. West, then President of the Baptist Union of Tasmania.

Max Kingdom was pastor of both Taroona and Sandy Bay for the next couple of years.



The Baptist Church as built in 1953.

PHOTO REG ESCOTT.

The average attendance of the Sunday morning services at this time was about 30. In January 1955 the Tarooma Baptist Fellowship decided to become independent and form a separate church. The first Deacons' meeting of the Tarooma Baptist Church was held on the 19th May 1955. It consisted of K. Denholm, C. Horbury, R. Escott and L. Escott.

Max Kingdom resigned from the pastorates of Sandy Bay and Tarooma in November 1955. Tarooma Baptist's next pastor, Charles Rodman, arrived in 1957 and left in May 1961. Robbie Robinson was a part-time pastor from May 1961 to June 1962. Jack Kippax then served as moderator until the arrival of Ken Tuck in October 1963.

Ken Tuck left in December 1968 and the church was without a pastor for the next three years. Richard Dangerfield was pastor for five months from January to May 1972.

Bill Bridge became the new pastor in April 1973 until May 1976. In June Robbie Robinson returned and stayed until February 1978. After he left Richard Dangerfield also returned to serve as pastor for a few months

from July to September 1978.

In February 1979 Bill Penny became the new pastor. At the start of his ministry the average morning attendance had grown to between 50 and 60. Towards the end of Bill Penny's ministry the church was extensively renovated and virtually rebuilt. While this was being carried out services were held in the new Tarooma Community Hall. The church building was re-opened and dedicated on the 10th December 1983.

The present pastor, Peter Evans, replaced Bill Penny in January 1984.

In May 1984 the Kingston Baptist fellowship closed and its remaining members transferred to Tarooma Baptist, boosting the attendance by about a dozen. John Wilson joined Peter Evans as an Associate Pastor in January 1986. At present the average morning attendance is between 90 and 100, with most of the congregation coming from Tarooma, Kingston and Blackmans Bay.

As a matter of interest, Tarooma Baptist is the most southern Baptist church in Australia, and possibly the third most southern Baptist church in the world.



Tarooma Baptist Church, 1986.

PHOTO ANDREW LORD