

VISIT TO SOUTHWELL and KARIEGA BAPTIST CHURCH 20 May 2021 by Yvonne Surtees

On Thursday 20 May, 43 members set off from the Port Alfred Civic Centre at 9am sharp to visit the old school and St James church in Southwell, where Moira Stirk kindly addressed us. This was followed by a visit to the historic Baptist Church in Kariega, where we were addressed by Hubert Webber, whose family has long been connected with the area.

SOUTHWELL

Southwell has an interesting history, which is inextricably tied to Benjamin Keeton and Lombard's Post, a fortified farmhouse in the area near the ruins of Theopolis, an early mission station (1814-1850.) The land was originally granted to Pieter Lombard in 1790 as a loan farm. In 1812 a military garrison was established on a site a few hundred metres below the surviving Lombard's Post buildings. In 1817 the land was granted to Major George Sackville Fraser of Grahamstown (after whom the Fraser's Camp Signal Tower was named) as a reward for services to the government, and Fraser lived at Lombard's Post after he retired until his death in 1823.

The farm passed into the hands of Benjamin Keeton, a wealthy horsebreeder, in 1839. He built the existing fortified farmhouse near the old post, and during the Frontier War of 1850 soldiers and horses were stationed there. Lombard's Post is still in the Keeton family. It was restored in the 1980s but has become somewhat run down over time.

Benjamin Keeton of Southwell, Notts. (pronounced Suthell in Nottinghamshire) was 19 when he embarked on the *Albury* with Calton's Party of settlers. He was the son of Mary Becher, daughter of Richard Becher, and he and his sister Susanna were the children of Mary's second marriage to William Keeton. Benjamin's father and two of his uncles had been choirboys (1761-1766) in Southwell Minster, the town's collegiate church, elevated to Cathedral status in 1884. The Rev J T Becher was vicar-general at the Minster.

Not much is known of Benjamin in South Africa until his marriage to Hannah Ford on 23 May 1829 in Grahamstown. She was the widow of William Ford, also an 1820 settler, and she and Benjamin had four children.

Original Southwell School



In 1843 Benjamin donated land for the building of a school, which was also to serve as a chapel, and named the area Southwell after his hometown. On 2 February 1844 Col Henry Somerset laid the foundation stone and the building was completed the same year. The official opening service was conducted by Rev John Heavyside on 3 December.

Above: Southwell School. The near end of the building was the original chapel and classroom.
(Photo: Marilyn Pattenden)

The first resident teacher was Robert Miller from Uitenhage, who lived in a house alongside the school, and there were 22 pupils. On Sundays the end classroom, which has a pitched roof, was used as a chapel and the resident teacher usually doubled as minister. In 1847 during the 7th Frontier War the school was used as a signal station. Bishop Gray¹ visited from Cape Town in October 1848 and celebrated communion, and in 1849 Archdeacon Merriman, accompanied by Col Somerset, rode from Grahamstown to examine the pupils.

Alterations in 1873 saw the addition of a 60 ft yellowwood passage on the south side and the teacher's residence was connected to the school by an 'ante-room'. Later the building was made a double storey and a lean-to bathroom and kitchen were added. In 1920 it became a home for friendless boys, the aim being to assist World War I orphans and increase pupil numbers. It was hoped to increase the number to 30 pupils so that an assistant teacher could be employed. Such a teacher would have to be able to teach Dutch! In 1943 the enrolment numbered only 19 and the families of some of the children had been resident in the district for almost a century! The Education Department closed the school in 1991 but the parents and community continued their support and it carried on in a private capacity (with permission) as a rural school, until 2004 when numbers forced it to close. As Moira pointed out, these country children received individual attention, got a good grounding and were saved from going to boarding school at a very young age. Visits were organised to Grahamstown schools and a concert was held at the end of each year. At one point a school bus, driven by Saunders Keeton and his wife Nesta, picked up children all over the district. There was no electricity, no mod cons, and only a long-drop toilet! Moira taught at the school for 40 years. Some LAHS members were able to wander around the outside of the old school building to note the pitched roof of the chapel/classroom at one end.

St James Church Motto: *I am among you as He that serveth.*

In the 1860s, after three frontier wars, a period of peace brought the desire for a proper place of worship. Benjamin Keeton donated a further 5 morgen of his land and funds were raised from as far afield as Graaff Reinet. It was also decided to lay out a burial ground and charge a fee of £2 per plot. This old cemetery is surrounded by a 5 ft stone wall, and the stone horse mounts are still visible in the wall. Bishop Gray promised £200 if a matching sum could be raised. Benjamin Keeton donated £100. Some gave in kind. Charles Penny donated the iron gates that still stand at the entrance to the old cemetery. The quarrying of stone was commenced on Lombard's Post, Woodlands and Wolf's Crag farms in 1870. The architect was Mr Welchman and builders were Carney, Hodges and Patrick.

The Rev Canon Waters from St Mark's Mission was invited to lay the foundation stone in August 1870. He had served the community in the period 1849 – 1855 and had started a school in his home for Xhosa children. Eventually a stone building was erected and in 1850 this was the first Anglican mission of its kind in Southern Africa.

St James church was opened on 6 December 1871. It was pouring with rain; hymn 180 was sung and Bishop Gray preached the sermon, commenting that he 'was glad to see that they had not forgotten the heathen but side by side with the English Church arose a native Chapel', referring to the mission church nearby.

¹ The Bishop was married to Sophie Gray, who designed Southwell's St James, as well as many other churches in South Africa at the time.



Left: Yvonne Surtees tries out the 'steps' in the old cemetery wall which helped ladies of the past to mount their horses

Below: The elegant frontage of St James Church, Southwell (Photo: Sue Gordon)



In 2000 this was restored and dedicated to St Thomas. Sadly, it is derelict today. Bishop Merriman of Grahamstown took the communion. The Rev Robert Washington Stumbles (whose maternal grandfather was a first cousin of U S President George Washington) served at Southwell from 1869 -1877 and during the next 40 years the church had several resident ministers. The church bell was bought in 1890. The church was renovated in 1981 and again in 2004, and is beautifully preserved.



Above: Gravestone of settler Benjamin Keeton and his wife and son. Keeton came from Southwell, Nottinghamshire in 1820, owned Lombard's Post, donated the land for St James' Church and named it after his English home town. (Photo: Sue Gordon)

Moira Stirk pointed out various items inside the church. On the front right wall of the nave is a marble shelf which was presented by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, London, and is a portion of the reredos [ornamental screen] which was destroyed by enemy action on the night of 19 October 1940. A marble plaque above it depicts the names of Southwell pupils who served in World War I.

The memorial window in the chancel depicts the crucifixion in the centre with St James on the right and St John on the left. These 3 window sections were ordered from England in memory of William Gray, field-cornet of Southwell, who lost his life in June 1851 in an engagement with rebels at Theopolis Mission; the lights (stained-glass windows) are by Wailes of Newcastle. There are several beautiful stained-glass windows along the nave in memory of local family members.

After visiting the church LAHS members wandered through the old and new cemeteries and enjoyed their tea on the lawns before moving on to Kariega, 15 km distant.

KARIEGA
Kariega Baptist Church



Over forty members of LAHS and their hosts outside the Kariega Baptist Church 20 May 2021

Hubert Webber met us on arrival at the church and we gathered outside (there were too many to fit into the little church and obey Covid protocols) and without a single note, he gave us a fascinating history of the area, pointing out many of the gravestones. The Kariega Baptist Church was once the centre of a vibrant community but today the graves bear silent testimony to the families who built and nurtured it.

The Settler history of the area begins with Richard and Elizabeth Bowles (see also Toposcope 2014) who arrived in South Africa aboard the *Weymouth* as part of the William Menezes party. They were first located at Rietfontein and then moved, together with Parkins's party to the Kariega River. They had sailed with seven Amos children and two Bowles children. Elizabeth had married Henry Amos and after the birth of three children he was presumed lost at sea and she married Richard Bowles, her childhood sweetheart, and they had a daughter. Henry Amos reappeared and took back his wife and a further four Amos children were born. Then he was truly lost at sea and she was reunited with Richard Bowles and had another daughter, Jemima, just prior to sailing.

Richard was a bold, tough veteran of the Napoleonic Wars. The story, as told to Doris Stirk, goes that James Munro, a passing preacher, whilst outspanned at the farm, Vaalvlei, is said to have heard abusive language from Richard Bowles. When Munro rebuked him, Richard was ashamed and asked Rev Munro if he would kindly hold a service for those close by. Munro agreed if Bowles would gather a group of people. This he did and they

met at Thomas Eastland's house for the first service in the area. This led to a desire for more. Rev Davies from Grahamstown agreed to conduct fortnightly services and thus it was that Kariega became a Baptist community. Rev Munro served the community until his death in 1838.



Left: Plaque at church entrance
(Photo: Sue Gordon)

There was soon a desire for a house of worship and in 1834 Thomas Eastland donated a portion of his ground near the river for the erection of a church. Rev Davies laid the foundation stone. The farmers got together and in the same year the foundations were laid and the walls erected to a height of 3 ft. Then, as a result of three frontier wars, the building of the church came to a halt and the walls stayed as they were for twenty years. Thomas Eastland moved from the area, but the Baptist cause at Kariega endured during these dark years. Services were held at various homes

but mainly that of Charles Webber. After his death in 1848 they moved to the home of James John Baines, who was married to Richard and Elizabeth's youngest daughter, Jemima. James Baines and John Webber served as lay preachers, aided by Rev A Hay from Grahamstown, who often had to walk 30 miles to preach his sermon.

Eventually, in 1852, rifles were laid down and trowels taken up under the direction of Rev Hay and the humble little church with a mud floor and thatch roof was completed in December 1854. Had it been completed by the former date, 1834, it would have been the oldest established church building in the Baptist Union of South Africa. The popularity of the church grew, congregations increased and by 1865 the church had to be enlarged. In 1858 Ralph Turner bought land on the farm Vaalvlei next to the church and built a room on it. He went away suddenly but allowed the church the use of this room. It was used as a dining room and for the holding of Bible classes. In 1904 legal title was granted to the church by prescriptive right as they had paid the taxes for 40 years, and the room was enlarged to form a vibrant community centre complete with tennis court.



Above: Hubert Webber, fifth generation descendant of Kariega settlers, regales LAHS members with his family history
(Photo: Sue Gordon)

In 1902 membership stood at 55, with many Amos, Bowles and Webber names. A manse, incorporating a large schoolroom, was erected around 1884 on land donated by Daniel Webber, son of Charles, and Rev Kelly became the first resident minister and

schoolmaster. This, however, was fairly short-lived and from 1918 Kariega no longer had its own resident minister.



From 1902 to 1960 the Amos, Webber and Bowles population had decreased from 40 to 6. The church was served by Port Alfred and Grahamstown ministers until 1981, when the doors were closed for 14 years. During this time the church grounds were faithfully maintained by Horace Webber, Hubert's father, but the community centre and tennis court had been neglected and were eventually demolished.

Today only the ruins of the manse remain. Around 1994 a Baptist Fellowship was formed under Grahamstown at the instigation of Edwin and Olive Dickason with Brian Still of Grahamstown conducting a monthly service. The church was declared a national monument in 1977 and the last descendant of the Kariega settlers left in 2002. Today the church is used only for special services, such as weddings and funerals.

Church organ which she last played in 2014 at the community's final service.
(Photo: Sue Gordon)



After a most enjoyable outing the LAHS members returned to their cars and the dirt road which was dustier than ever in the prevailing drought conditions!

REFERENCES

Bailes, Doug. *As we were*. 2004
150th Anniversary of the Kariega Baptist Church brochure.
Stirk, Doris. *Southwell Settlers*

Above: Distant cousins, both descendants of the Bowles-Amos settlers: Hubert Webber and Pat Bailes (Photo: Sue Gordon)