

The Life of Samuel Cozens

By Laurie Rowston



Samuel Cozens.

To date nothing has ever been written on the author of two small Tasmanian publications published in the memory of the Rev. Henry Dowling, the publications being *A Tribute of Affection* and *Tracts of Truth and Incidents in the Life of the Rev. Henry Dowling*. By the time of his death, the author, the Rev. Samuel Cozens (1820-1887), a Strict and Particular Baptist, had published 44 books and pamphlets including his 190 page autobiography *The Christmas Box* (c.1866). Migrating to the Antipodes for his health, he arrived in Launceston in 1868 and soon polarised the divisions in the York Street Baptist Chapel.

Baptist Fortunes in Tasmania up to the Time of Cozen's Arrival

The period between Cozen's arrival in 1868 and 1884 was one of the decisive chapters in the history of Baptists in Tasmania. **The Baptist churches'** official presence in Van Diemen's Land began in 1834 with the arrival of the Rev. Henry Dowling, who had been pastor of the Colchester Particular Baptist Church in England. Based in the north, Dowling became pastor of the Launceston York Street Chapel, which opened in December 1840. A group of Hobart Town Baptists had previously constituted the first Baptist Church in the Australian colonies, in June 1835. Their Hobart chapel was officially opened in March 1841. The Hobart cause never gained strength, suffering disorder and division. Baptist fortunes connected with Dowling's work also were never great and declined following his death. In 1857 Dowling wrote of the work:

As a body they [the Baptists] are scattered, and the elements of division have been so great, that, for the present, at least, there is but little ground to hope for any reunion or co-operation in the Gospel of our God. There is no doubt but there are many who enjoy spiritual life under our denominational churches, but they are so fast bound in congregational standing with others, that it would require some especial providence connected with the power of God to induce a change.¹

Many of the 220 children he had dedicated in the colony by then were found in other denominations. During his years of ministry in Tasmania he baptised 300 people but only one person, Daniel Allen, became a full-time minister and Allen worked in Melbourne and Sydney. In the late 1860s a new Baptist work commenced when the eminent London preacher, the Rev. C H Spurgeon, began sending out young students from his Pastors' College at the request of Mary Ann and William Gibson, wealthy pastoralists of 'Native Point', Perth. The Gibsons paid for the passage of these men and built churches, chapels, halls and manses once they arrived. Spurgeon's son, Thomas, visited the island five times between 1878 and 1890.²

Cozens in Launceston

Cozens, an itinerant preacher, had been ordained to the Christian ministry on 20 October 1859.³ He was pastor of churches at Farnborough (1846), Wolverhampton (1849), Willenhall (1850), Somers Town, London (1856), Warboys (1858) and

Shadwell (1859) prior to his departure, for health reasons, for Australia in 1866. He sailed on the *Young Lochinvar* and arrived in Sydney on 17 February 1866. There he worked as a grocer as well as preaching at the Rev. John Bunyan McCure's Baptist chapel. In 1867 he arrived in Tasmania with his wife Mary and five of their seven children. Their arrival coincided with Dowling's retirement from the York Street Chapel and with the arrival in Launceston of the Rev. Frederick Hibberd (c.1836-1908) to take charge of the chapel.

Hibberd was the first Spurgeon's man to come to Australia, and had ministered in Sydney.⁴ Hibberd, not an ardent advocate for closed communion, had been in consultation with York Street Chapel. With Dowling's retirement imminent, Hibberd offered his services but there was the problem of open or closed communion. The Launceston chapel was dividing over the question of whether or not to change to an open communion position and, when it did so, nine resigned. In a subsequent letter he commented on the "table question":

You could hardly expect persons who are really strict in principles of that nature to remain in a church where their opinions were upset. ...Yet it is to be deplored that men should allow such trifles to be a barrier to the communion of saints... Do not suppose that I look upon this division as an unmixed evil. It is far better for them to separate themselves from the church if they are not prepared to unite to carry out its measures heartily and without manifestations of bitterness and party feeling.

In a further letter he added a word about "the Separatist Brethren", urging the church to treat them with all kindness and charity and to give them credit for being sincere.

The York Street Chapel became "open communion" on 27 May 1867. Cozens became the shepherd of the nine members of closed communion persuasion who had seceded. He rented out the large room at the Town Hall for a term of twelve months and began building work on a small chapel for 200 people in Upper Balfour Street. *The Launceston Examiner*, unaware of the split in the chapel, reported that the Baptists were occupying the Town Hall "during repairs to the [York Street] chapel".⁵ Built by Connolly, the chapel [at 1 Balfour Street] opened on 25 December 1867. Cozens based his opening sermon on 1 Chronicles 29.1, "For the palace is not for man but for the Lord".⁶

Within a year the new body of Strict Communion Baptists, numbering twenty members, had commenced a Sabbath school and published a journal.⁷ Early in 1869 Cozens was conducting his own day school in the Upper Balfour Street chapel.⁸ Cozens' visit to Launceston thereby helped polarise the theological differences that existed among Baptists at the York Street Chapel. While Australian Baptists in the other colonies at the time were moving towards an evangelical tolerance and unity, Cozens stood for the remoteness and rigidity of Hyper-Calvinist Baptist sechhood.

Three months after the death of the Rev. Henry Dowling on 29 March 1869, the Balfour chapel closed. Hibberd already had returned to Sydney, presumably because of financial struggles at the chapel.⁹

Cozens had admired Dowling greatly from afar, having heard a good deal about him, knew those he was acquainted with in the old country and had visited the places where Dowling had been in ministry. Their brief friendship grew as Cozens visited daily between early January 1869 and the time of Dowling's death. More than likely, Cozens was given access to Dowling's papers and soon published in his memory, *A Tribute of Affection*. He followed this with *Tracts of Truth and Incidents in the Life of the Rev. Henry Dowling*.

Cozens preached his farewell sermon at the York Street Chapel at the end of July 1869 as he prepared to proceed to Adelaide, having accepted a unanimous call from the Ebenezer Particular Baptist church in North Adelaide.¹⁰

The nearby Tea Tree Gully School at 4 Dowding Terrace, North Adelaide, opened in April 1870 and Cozens became its first schoolmaster. There he lectured on, amongst other subjects, his unique collection of Australian shells, botanical specimens and Australian bugs and beetles in order to raise funds for fittings for the school. Due to his effort, by the end of 1870, the number of students had increased from nineteen to seventy-four, including twenty evening students.¹¹

He returned to England in 1875 and served in the English pastorates of Willenhall once more, Sutton, Isle of Ely in 1878 and finally Ipswich (1881) where he died on 29 July 1887.¹²

Cozens' Early Life Story

It is from his biography, *The Christmas Box*, that we are given keen insight in Cozens' early life. He writes in such a way that the reader will detect the Providence of God in his life. Samuel was the favourite of ten children. He was born on 8 November 1820 to Samuel and Mary Cozens, at Wilton, near Salisbury. His hotelier father was a successful brewer.¹³ But in his youth Samuel began a dissolute life of alcohol addiction, gambling and swearing.¹⁴ Following his schooling, he repeatedly failed to retain his employment whether it was in London or near home.¹⁵ Sporadically he attended church and at about the age of 23 he went through a typical Calvinistic conversion which was accompanied by much agony of the soul and he was baptised in the Baptist way at Lessness Heath, Kent (east of London on the Thames) in 1843. In his book, *A Treatise on a Divine Call to the Ministry* he wrote:

In my former book, I gave you...a little account of God's mercifully preserving me in seasons of imminent danger...of my awful position as a vile, blaspheming, horrid sinner. Surely there never existed as blacker Ethiopian!...how the dear Lord delivered me about ten o'clock in my bed room in the house of Messrs Stuckey and Meade, wholesale and retail drapers and grocers, Langport, Somerset.¹⁶

He commenced preaching but without great success and with much criticism because of his past life. Finally a small Particular Baptist church in Farnborough, Hampshire, offered him one pound a week to be their pastor. He was now married with a little boy.¹⁷ A position at the Langport Particular Baptist Church (near Yeovil in Somerset) followed where friends set him up in business¹⁸ and as the business prospered, the things of God took back stage. Moving from poverty to riches, he "grew worldly" declining pastoral calls and turning down preaching appointments. Then as both business and sermon preparation fell off he felt "the hand of God" lift from him. He had to admit that he had no head for the retail trade.¹⁹ But again he saw the providence of God as he was able to sell his stock and settle his affairs. Coupled with this was a pastoral call from Wolverhampton (in the West Midlands – between Coventry and Shrewsbury) which he accepted. After some time there were some who wanted to see the back of him.

His next placement was at Willenhall, also in the West Midlands, in 1853 but by 1856 relationships had soured again in the concerted move, by the means of pamphlets, letters and reports, to have rid of him. He was labelled an Arminian, an Antinomian and a legalist.²⁰ Throughout all this, he was having greater success at penmanship than preaching. He left Willenhall destitute having experienced two large salary reductions.²¹ He ministered for a short time at Brentford in the North Midlands, then at the Beulah Chapel, Somerstown, London, (from about May 1856) where once again matters became strained. He was farewelled on 23 March 1858. A number of short pastorates followed, some as short as three weeks.²² By now he was well read, being familiar with the leading Particular Baptists – Gadsby, Stevens, Whitfield, Philpot, Wells and Huntington.

He was called to Warboys, near Cambridge, commencing 8 July 1858.²³ The welcome and generosity of the folk was abounding but again there were some who would cause him trouble, considering him a heretic. It was rumoured correctly that he was in debt, to the sum of £50 to one person alone. Cozens had received an advance of £50 or £60 for his work the *Teacher's Thought Book* but it had not sold as hoped.²⁴ On his £100 a year he was keeping a family with eight or possibly nine children. Before leaving Warboys, he came into some money and dealt with his debts.²⁵

He accepted a position at Shadwell Particular Baptist Church, London, in 1860 and the call was extended after six months early in 1861. Finally he found success at the Rehoboth Particular Baptist Chapel in Victoria Street, London. There he wrote *Christmas Box*, confessing at the end of the work, "I belong to a sect in whose vocabulary there are no 'flattering titles'." By now he had published 43 works of which totalled 100,000 printings.²⁶

The Demise of Dowling's work

Insight into the thinking which led to the demise of the Particular strand of Baptist life in Tasmania can be gained first by considering its spokesmen who were present in Launceston at the time of Dowling's retirement and death in the late 1860s. Apart from Cozens, there were also the Revs Daniel Allen and John Bunyan McCure. Both believed that the distinctive doctrines they held so firmly were rooted in scripture. They also were persuaded fully that in the stand they were making for restricted communion, and against "duty faith" teaching,²⁷ they were doing the will of God. They were convinced that high-Calvinism was Biblical truth.

At this time, the Particular work in Tasmania was only holding its own. The Rev. Henry Dowling was never a hard-line Calvinist as were Cozens, Allen and McCure. Neither was he a strong close communionist as evidenced by Congregationalist George Best, who attended his services in the Launceston Town Hall prior to the erection of the York Street Chapel in 1841. Wrote Best, "He is more liberal than most Baptists allowing mixed communion".²⁸

The Rev. John Bunyan McCure

In 1862 the Rev. John Bunyan McCure, a Hyper-Calvinist sectarian from the British Baptists who had been in the colonies since 1852, was preaching often for Dowling, "whose feebleness rendered him almost inaudible".²⁹ Four years later he returned from the mainland to Launceston, lecturing and showing slides using his dissolving view apparatus with the object of reducing the debt on his Sydney chapel.³⁰ He stood in the line of the English Hyper-Calvinists John Gill, William Gadsby and the Gospel Standard Churches. Typical of English Strict and Particular Baptists, McCure rejected "duty-faith".

As with Cozens, McCure preached a gospel of salvation restricted to the elect. McCure and his sectarians made it a point not to preach indiscriminately lest the non-elect be openly invited into the Christian fellowship, hence the term "Particular".³¹ In the second half of the 19th century, the majority of Baptist churches in England were moving on to a view called 'evangelical Calvinism', most notably taught by Baptist Andrew Fuller. This was a more moderate form of Calvinism which fully encouraged evangelism, and was more balanced on a number of points. At the end of his life, McCure finally embraced Fuller's views while remaining Calvinistic in his theology.³²

The Rev. Daniel Allen

The controversial Daniel Allen, the scourge of the papacy in the late 1870s, visited Launceston to be at Dowling's death-bed and supply the York Street pulpit for three months.³³ As a youth Allen immigrated to Australia in 1844 at the request of his father, arriving in Sydney in January 1845. He then made his way to Launceston where he

was reunited with his father, a deacon of the York Street Chapel. Allen was baptised by Dowling and admitted to membership.³⁴ In 1849 he moved to Melbourne and began preaching. He later claimed to have been the first person to have held a religious service on the Ballarat goldfields. In 1853 he took charge of a church at Preston.³⁵ Over the years other preaching stations and chapels opened to him. On the Eaglehawk (Bendigo) goldfields he caused controversy on the subject of baptism.³⁶ In 1870 Allen was invited to Castlereagh Street Church, Sydney, in place of McCure who was leaving for England. Allen was an Orange Lodge man of the first order, anti-Roman Catholic to extreme. In Sydney during March 1878 he provoked “the Hyde Park riots”.³⁷ Intolerant, obnoxious and sectarian, Allen denounced error and all false doctrines wherever they could be found.

Allen held the Presidency of the Particular Baptist Association of Australia until his death. More than any other figure among Australian Baptists, Allen placed an indelible stamp of Hyper-Calvinism on the Strict and Particular Baptists. An heir to the theology of a long line of English Hyper-Calvinists such as John Gill and William Gadsby, Allen too preached that redemption is not universal and that the objects of redemption are the elect of God. Only God's elect had the responsibility to repent and believe. From 1869 short ministries followed at the York Street Chapel. They were carried out by the Revs John W Bamber, George P Lush of Melbourne, Charles Cater and William Bentley of Brunswick.

Conclusion

The attempt to propagate an extremely deterministic view of God's sovereignty – in that the message of salvation was restricted to the elect and not to be preached indiscriminately, that there was a futility of man's will in choosing his ultimate destiny – failed in Tasmania. In the end, this obscure and isolated sect dwindled in numbers and influence. The natural result was that very few people were brought into its local churches, save the children of those already members. But prospects grew brighter for Tasmanian Baptists in Tasmania in the 1870s and on through the arrival and work of 17 preachers from C H Spurgeon's Pastors' College, London, and their Tasmanian patrons: William Gibson Senior and his wife Mary Anne and their son, William Gibson Junior and spurred on by the visits of Spurgeon's son, Thomas. The older and harsher interpretations of Calvinism quickly gave way to more moderate views. It was a triumph over Hyper-Calvinism and closed communion. For Baptists in Tasmania, it meant a rediscovery of mission based on a renewed theology on strong evangelical preaching and denominational building, and the creation of an organisation, the Baptist Union of Tasmania in 1884, for the fulfilment of that mission.

¹ Letter of Dowling dated 16 November 1857 in Joseph Jewell Westwood, *The Journal of J. J. Westwood (evangelist)*, Melbourne, 1865, p. 18.

² Laurence F Rowston, *Baptists in Van Diemen's Land, the Story of Tasmania's First Baptist Church*, Baptist Union of Tasmania, Hobart, 1985, p. 89.

³ *Baptist Magazine*, 1859, p. 765.

⁴ *Launceston Examiner*, 24 August 1867, p. 4, c. 1.

⁵ *Launceston Examiner*, 2 July 1867, p. 5, c. 4; 25 July 1867, p. 4; 25 August 1867; 20 August 1867, p. 2, c. 7.

⁶ *Launceston Examiner*: 21 December 1867, p. 2, c. 7; Advertisement, 24 December, p. 1, c. 7.

⁷ *Launceston Examiner*: 16 July 1868, p. 2, c. 1; 14 September 1867, p. 2, c. 3; 24 October 1867, p. 4.

⁸ *Launceston Examiner*, 23 March 1869, p. 3, c. 4.

⁹ Records of the York Street Launceston Chapel – in archives of Baptist Union of Tasmania holdings at the University of Tasmania; M Petras, 'Reverend Frederick Hibberd, The Forgotten Father of NSW Baptists', in R Case (ed.), *A Man of God*, R Case, Eastwood, 1990, pp.142-50.

¹⁰ *Launceston Examiner*: 24 July 1869; 27 July 1869, p. 3, c. 3; 12 August 1869.

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- ¹¹ Tea Tree Gully School, www.teatreegully.sa.gov.au.
- ¹² *Earthen Vessel* from 1865 ff – A full memoir including a list of various publications by Cozens was published in the (English) Baptist Handbook for 1888, pp. 91-2. One of his books is *Teachers' Thought-book* and another is *Teachers and Teaching*. According to *Memoirs of Ministers* (p. 91), given in the *Baptist Union of Great Britain Handbook* of 1887, he died on 1 July 1887.
- ¹³ Samuel Cozens, *The Christmas Box, or The Great Festival*, T Matthews, London, p. 48.
- ¹⁴ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 163.
- ¹⁵ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 48.
- ¹⁶ *A Treatise on a Divine Call to the Ministry; to which is added, The Dispensation of God's Providence in putting Samuel Cozens into that important work*, Houlston & Stoneman, London, 1847, p. 8ff.
- ¹⁷ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 69.
- ¹⁸ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 73.
- ¹⁹ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 75.
- ²⁰ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 82f.
- ²¹ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 85.
- ²² Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 94.
- ²³ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 100.
- ²⁴ He had borrowed £70, sold 424 copies, paid back £24 but publishers had not forwarded him £30. But in fact by November 1859 he owed only £15. *The Christmas Box*, p. 118.
- ²⁵ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 128.
- ²⁶ Cozens, *The Christmas Box*, p. 179, p. 113.
- ²⁷ "Duty-faith" has been defined as the universal human responsibility to repent and believe the gospel which was characteristic of both Arminianism and Evangelical Calvinism, Iain H Murray, *Spurgeon vs Hyper-Calvinism. Spurgeon and Strict Baptists*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, p. 56.
- ²⁸ Rowston, *Baptists in Van Diemen's Land*, p. 17.
- ²⁹ *Launceston Examiner*, 5 April 1866, p. 5, c. 3.
- ³⁰ *Launceston Examiner*: 31 December 1864, p. 5, c. 3; 7 January 1865, p. 5, c. 2; 3 January 1865, p. 5, c. 2 note and advertisement p. 1, c. 6; *Launceston Examiner*: 7 June 1866; 21 June 1866, p. 3, c. 6; 9 July 1866; 11 July 1866; 13 July 1866, p. 3, c. 6; 18 July 1866; 17 July 1866; 19 July 1866; 30 July 1866; 31 July 1866; 1 Aug 1866.
- ³¹ 17th Century Baptists were generally Calvinistic who admitted believers on their declaration of their faith in baptism, into congregationally ordered churches. The sinner is seen to be completely helpless; he cannot be exhorted as this would imply creature faith. So far as salvation is concerned, he can only be told to sit and wait for the Spirit of God to convict of sin and then give some token in this experience that he is indeed an elect soul. Faith is the gift of God and the unbeliever "cannot believe till it be given him to believe". True, folk are encouraged to attend the means of grace, in the hope that the Lord will speak to them. They were so zealous to maintain the sovereignty of God that they denied that preachers had the right 'to offer Christ' to unregenerate sinners. It was only legitimate to pray for the well-being of believers and not the conversion of sinners.
- ³² Graham Beynon, *History of the Eden Baptist Church*, <http://www.eden-cambridge.org/history>; For details of McCure's travels, see John Bunyan McCure, *Life in England and Australia: Reminiscences of Travels and Voyages over One Hundred Thousand Miles; or, Forty Years in the Wilderness: A Memorial of the Loving kindness of the Lord*, London, 1876; and Michael Chavura, *The Australian dictionary of evangelical biography*, Brian Dickey (ed.), Evangelical History Association, Sydney, 1994, p. 230.
- ³³ Records of the York Street Launceston Church – in archives of BUT holdings at the University of Tasmania, p. 257.
- ³⁴ Records of the York Street Launceston Church, 10 September 1845; 24 September 1845.
- ³⁵ John Chandler, *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, reprinted by Loch Haven Books, 1990, p. 41; York Street Chapel minutes.
- ³⁶ *Launceston Examiner*, 16 April 1868.
- ³⁷ *Protestant Standard*, 13 Nov 1886.