



## WAVERLEY COUNCIL

# EBENEZER VICKERY



Images from top:

Ebenezer Vickery. Image courtesy of the University of Wollongong.

Vickery family, 1901. Ebenezer and Jane's golden wedding anniversary.

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### A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the following article may contain images of people who are deceased

The discovery of gold in 1851 at Ophir, near Bathurst, and the ensuing gold rush, ignited a boom in migration that lasted until the 1890s and changed the face of Australia forever.

It was during this period that Ebenezer Vickery, son of a boot and shoe manufacturer, gradually built up a vast empire of manufacturing, mining, shipping and property. Ebenezer Vickery served on various boards and committees and was a leading and active member of the Sydney Methodist Church.

Vickery was born in 1827 in London and came to Australia with his family in 1833. Leaving school at the age of 16 to work for an ironmonger, his achievements were remarkable given his humble beginnings.

According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*,

'self made and self contained, Vickery cared little about society and culture: his business, his family, his church and his philanthropic work were his absorbing interests.'

He married his first wife, Jane Begg, in 1851. They had six children, three girls and three boys.

### **VICKERY AND THE METHODIST CHURCH**

In 1887 Ebenezer Vickery was appointed to the Legislative Council of NSW from which forum he defended capitalism, attacked "union leaders and socialistic agitators" and opposed the eight-hour clause and the proposed minimum age of 14 for boys in mines.

## LYCEUM THEATRE AND AN EXETER HALL.

A story was current yesterday that the Lyceum Theatre, bought by Mr. Ebenezer Vickery during the past week for £24,000, was to be converted into a sort of Exeter Hall, and was to be opened in that character by General Booth on his next visit to Australia. Interviewed on the subject, Mr. Vickery, said:—"A lot of things are running in my mind. A part may be used for some sort of amusements, and a part for social reform; there is nothing at all settled about it at present."

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He was a staunch Methodist with a strong evangelical dedication to his church. Amongst his generous donations to the church was his funding of the Tent Missions of 1902–1904. These consisted of missions to eighty towns in NSW from fully equipped tents complete with teams of evangelists.

Vickery was also responsible for the purchase and gift to the church of the Lyceum Theatre in Pitt Street – an interesting purchase for someone to whom pleasure was derived not from the popular arts, but from church activities.

Vickery's main interest was evangelical work and he was strongly involved in the Wesley Methodist Church Sustentation and Extension Society. This society was set up to promote 'the spread of holiness through the land...to provide assistance to maintain ministers among scattered or neglected populations and to aid in the erection of new churches, parsonages, and schoolrooms and the liquidation of old debts.'

In its first half century, Vickery and a wealthy minister, Rev. W. Schofield, donated more than half the total income of £300,000 to the Society. Vickery, described as the Central Methodist Mission's most prominent early supporter, also paid the shortfall from advertising revenue for the publication of the Mission's periodical *Our Weekly Greeting*. In fact, Vickery supported – often financially – every aspect of the church's work.

He may also have been involved in the attempt to set up a Methodist Aboriginal Mission Station. A photo from the Vickery family album shows Ebenezer amongst Aboriginal children captioned '1904 at the Aborigines Mission Station, Cairns'. Although the Methodist Church were not successful in founding a mission until after Vickery's death, there was a Church of England mission named Yarrabah near Cairns that was founded in the late 1880s, which may be the mission featured in the photo.

Images from top:

Lyceum Theatre sale, *The Sunday Times*, 9 April 1905, p. 4.

Ebenezer Vickery at the Aborigines Mission Station, Cairns, 1904.



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Images from top:

Ebenezer and Jane Vickery,  
undated.

Vickery family home *Edina*,  
undated. Now the War  
Memorial Hospital, Waverley.

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## VICKERY'S LATER LIFE

In 1904 Jane Vickery died after over 50 years of marriage to Ebenezer. The following year, at 78 years old, Vickery married a teacher, Deborah Louise Ellis. They visited the USA and England to study modern evangelistic methods.

In the USA they survived the great Californian earthquake, but Ebenezer died after an operation at Leeds, UK, in 1906. He is buried in Waverley Cemetery.

His estate was sworn for probate at £483,354, of which £11,000 was mainly left to Methodist charities.

The magnificent home and grounds of the family home Edina was donated by his family to the Methodist Church in 1919 for use as a hospital. Now known as the War Memorial Hospital, the legacy of Ebenezer Vickery lives on both in his public deeds and in the buildings that he left behind.

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