

# REPORT ON SEPTEMBER MEETING

## Heretics or Prophets

At our September meeting, Dr Win Ward held us spellbound with her clear and scholarly presentation of the work of "five prominent New South Wales Methodists who, each in his own way, fitted the categories of theological liberals, secularists, Christian humanists or even heretics."

These five men were Bill Hobbin, Dudley Hyde, Ted Noffs, Charles Birch and Norman Webb, several of whom had been influenced by Professor Kenneth Edward, lecturer of Systematic Theology in St Andrews College Theological Hall, University of Sydney.

Two of these five actually served in the Wollongong area: Bill Hobbin in the late thirties and Dudley Hyde in the late sixties.

While stationed at Bulli, Bill Hobbin did much social work in supporting the need for housing in Port Kembla and the wharf labourers in their stand against the export of pig-iron to Japan. He was even credited with being the first to use the term Pig-iron Bob. In return, he earned the label of The Pink Parson.

Dudley Hyde also engaged in a lot of activities regarded as being outside the usual gambit expected of a Methodist minister, such as the Scouting movement and opposition to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. It is difficult to say which caused him the most trouble with his conservative parishioners: his alliance with the South Coast

Labour Council or his rather radical brand of theology.

Ted Noffs was another well-known member of this category, famous for his work with the Wayside Chapel at Kings Cross, where his own theology was reflected in great service to that community through his work with drug addicts and the establishment of the Life Education Centre project.

He regarded himself as part of all religions, past, present and future. Charles Birch and Norman Webb combined theology with philosophy. All five are "examples of achievements made since the 1930s in the name of secularised religion within the tradition of NSW Methodism." You can read all about them in Winifred's book, *Men Ahead of Their Time*.

It's a good read for people of any denomination, Christian or otherwise.