

# RECORD OF BUILDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT

(Covering a time span from 1929 to 2015)

The current buildings are an amalgam of 4-5 building stages, and this paper outlines these chronologically. There are accompanying photos at each stage.

## SECTION 1: 1920's -1930's

In the original plans for Canberra the precinct in Forrest was to have been for the building of the “Cathedrals” for the Roman Catholic Church (now St Christophers), the Anglican Church (now St Pauls), the Presbyterian Church (now St Andrews), the Methodist Church (now Wesley), and the Congregational Church. At the early development stage, the then Presbyterian minister, Rev Eric Owen had entered into an agreement with the Methodists and the Congregationalists, that rather than 3 separate cathedrals being built, they establish the United Churches of Canberra ACT. Plans were drawn up for the first building to be on the Methodist site and to be the Sunday School Hall and ‘classrooms’ with a kitchen and bathrooms and a store room, that would serve the three congregations. The plans were for the cathedral building to be started sometime later.

The building of the Methodist Sunday School was begun in 1928-29 and completed in 1930 and opened in November of that year.

At some stage, with the move to Melbourne of Rev Owen, the Presbyterians decided that they preferred to step back from the arrangement and build their own church and Sunday School. In the meantime until their church was built they continued to worship in the Methodist Hall in a combined service and using the Congregationalists hymnals.

The Methodists continued to worship in the Sunday School hall, using the Vercoe Room for meetings, small services, Sunday School and talks.

There was a bell tower entrance lobby to complete the structure. The overall appearance was of dark red brick with sandstone window and door surrounds a striking feature of the overall appearance. The roofing was of slate and the floors were timber. There is an arched feature window in the Vercoe Room with opaque plain glass - whether it was originally coloured glass, or intended to be so, is not clear from the reading I've done so far.

**ILLUSTRATIONS** include a copy of a 'photo from the Archives in the National Library, which now hangs on the outside wall of the original building, but within the 2001 foyer which incorporates the original structure. It shows the Sunday School under construction where neither the garb nor the equipment would be deemed suitable for todays' construction worker.

- ❖ Building in progress
- ❖ Planting an oak tree in front of the nearly finished church
- ❖ The church completed in 1930
- ❖ 19.1.1943 Bride arriving at the church
- ❖ 19.1.1943 Married couple - Len and Betty Temby
- ❖ March 1955 Guests arriving for the wedding of Maya Smith and Bob Simon in the original building.
- ❖ March 1955 The wedding party. The new church must be in 'mid-build' at this stage as it was officially opened in November of that year.

## SECTION 2      From 1930's to 1955

The move began before the outbreak of WW2 to build a church on the same site and adjoining the existing buildings which were proving inadequate and less than ideal.

The war intervened more than a little and the weekly Church newsletters bring home the impact of fathers and sons involved overseas, the loss of life and the uncertainty and narrowing of priorities. Those left behind increased their husbarding of resources and the climate was not right for a national appeal to build a national church.

However with the end of the war came the feeling that a church in the Nation's Capital should acknowledge a strong reference to the armed services, and the heroism, duty and loss of life and limb that the nation had endured.

The Methodist National Memorial Church thus evolved from the original Cathedral concept, and was to be paid for by the threepences and sixpences of the children's money boxes, and the grateful donations and offerings nationwide of the many Methodist households and it would serve as their central church.

Rev Walter Whitbread was selected to be both the minister of the parish and to head up the national appeal for funds to build the church.

This meant long and frequent absences from church and family as Walter travelled the length and breadth of the country asking for money to build a church that many of the donors would expect never to see. It was faith in action for all concerned and for poor Walter it was compounded by long train journeys, and returning to many places as the original visits had produced insufficient funds.

Eventually the money was gathered, architect appointed and the building firm of Burrowes and Lowe were successful in their tender - both were familiar with this church as they lived locally and the Burrowes attended weekly as members of the congregation.

The church was finished and opened in 1955.

Illustrations for this section include a Sept 1950 sketch plan for the development of Wesley Church, a photo of the completed church. Souvenir Order of the opening and Dedication services 19<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1955, & photos of the opening

## SECTION 3. Gymnasium and Lancaster Hall 1962-2002

In 1962 this centre was opened at the western end of the Wesley Hall. It consisted of a Gymnasium with a timber sprung floor, bathrooms and changing rooms, a large attached kitchen (named after the Piper family who were very much a Wesley family), a foyer, an office and meeting room and also had an upstairs - accessible by an external and an internal stairs.

A ‘manager’ Director of this new Youth Centre came from Sydney - Ed Walker, his wife Elizabeth and their two sons and a daughter. The youngest son, Peter, was to return many years later as one of our much loved and valued ministers.

The new facilities opened up tennis courts and indoor sports such as Basketball, Badminton, Indoor Soccer, Tai Kwando, Square Dancing, Tai Chi, Aerobics, Roller Derby and monthly dances and Scottish Dancing. Wesley members also sometimes did catering there for dinners and the Piper Kitchen was a great resource.

Many local people still refer to the wonderful dances held there, attracting 200 and 300 of an evening, enjoying live bands. It must have been a very busy and happening place in the ‘60’s and 70’s.

The White Heather Ball was an annual event in the Lancaster Hall and again that included Wesley people catering, serving and washing up. Latterly that catering service has shrunk as the cooks have retired with no-one to take their place, and the tightening of rules, charges and legal issues with insurance and requirements for specialized diets and the need to modernize the facilities would all add prohibitive costs. Nowadays prepared food is brought onto the premises only after thorough discussion and arrangements with selected hirers and payment of a considerable, but refundable, cleaning bond.

The Gymnasium is used as a wet weather venue by some football clubs for training, by standards exams for Tae Kwon Do, and exhibitions of the

Horticultural Society, the Gardening Club, the Budgerigar Club of NSW & Canberra and the Church Fete along with some very special farewell events to our ministers.

List of illustrations: Detailed floor plan of complex 1962-2000

- ❖ 1962 Opening of Wesley Fellowship Centre
- ❖ 11<sup>th</sup> December 1983 Farewell to Rev Ian Williams in the Lancaster Hall

## SECTION 4. RE-DEVELOPMENT AND ADDITIONS 2000 - 2015

In the late 1990's there had been some minor but significant works done in the church building to enlarge the front of the nave, enlarging the chancel and putting in the 'hideaway' lectern, putting in a moveable communion table, removing the communion rail and putting in new carpet. The communion rail in the side chapel was retained. There were new acoustic tiles put in, modifications and upgrading the organ and two newly donated stained glass windows put in.

After that time, under Rev Chris Udy and Rev Geoff Flynn, it was felt that the narrow cloisterway between the original building and the church was totally inadequate, that the need for more meeting rooms, more office space, offices for the ministers on site and more bathroom facilities was pressing. There was a need for a more welcoming and user friendly space for the church members to gather for social functions and for ministers and staff to be housed and available within the premises.

There was accompanying this development a new music centre built, and it deserves a section on its own.(Get from music centre)

This was to be a major investment of funds, time, plans and readjustments for the whole church community. This major redevelopment resulted in the removal of the cloisterway and in its place a large unstructured space flowed in one huge foyer from the side door of the church past the front wall of the Vercoe Room and including a slightly deconstructed tower entry, sweeping

forward well into the concreted apron and flax bed of the '80's and 90's and some of the carpark area.

The back wall of the existing church had a new doorway leading over a timber bridge to a curving link corridor on the left back to the new foyer and on the right to the new music centre. Straight ahead a double door of timber and copper opened up a new main entry to the church for significant occasions and quick ventilation, and steps beyond that to the carpark level.

This development also gave us three new and private courtyards which have been developed quite differently for three different purposes.

In the foyer there is a long wall of storage cupboards, but a double width of cupboard, was glassed in to create a history display. The majority of items came from the 1955 establishment of the National Memorial Methodist Church when not only money was given, but each state was asked to donate a significant item from their earliest days of Methodism in the colonies. These are detailed in the booklet beside the display.

At the time of the weekend of celebrations of 75 years of the Wesley Hall and 50 years of the Church building a history was produced and was part of the history display, and the role of the Rev Walter Whitbread came into sharper contrast and the fact that we had not acknowledged his contribution to the building, the parish and the wider church. We corrected that omission by naming the history display in the new foyer the Rev Walter Whitbread Pioneer Memorial Window and unveiled it that weekend with members of his family present.

That extension began a new phase in Wesley, there was a unified sense of the premises as all came together, the office entry being access to all aspects of the building and therefore more secure for hiring, meetings and evening events.

Since then our hirings have increased, the car parking issues have arisen and solutions, while initially expensive, have successfully dealt with the pressures on Wesley caused by the ever diminishing carparking spaces in the parliamentary triangle.

There have many needs, opportunities and ideas examined over the years as the church community questions the best use for our facilities and our land.

These have included an aged care facility, a child care centre, offices for social welfare and therapy rooms, and we have rented out the cottage and the manse for allied church personnel.

It will continue both to be in demand as a venue for the many groups mentioned and a home for the church community, and no doubt many more causes will arise in the future which will continue to challenge the decision makers in our church community.

Doubtless we have plenty of coloured ‘photos for this section, including some of Garths, or the one he took from the top of Minter Ellison.

Wesley W:) History of the Parish/2015 History on website/Record of building 1929-2015.docx