

City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: United Methodist Free Church
(former)

Citation No:
366

Other names: Church of Christ Chapel



Address: 96 Pakington Street, St Kilda

Heritage Precinct: Not applicable

Category: Religion: Church

Heritage Overlay: HO224

Style: Victorian

Graded as: Significant

Constructed: c.1858, 1922

Victorian Heritage Register: No

Designer: Unknown

Amendment: TBA

Comment: Revised citation

Significance

What is significant?

The former United Methodist Free Church (later Church of Christ) at 96 Pakington Street, St Kilda, is significant. The building comprises the rendered brick, symmetrically composed building with a pediment constructed c.1858 for the United Methodist Free Church, and the projecting gabled porch with face brickwork and stone dressings, added in 1922, when it was the Church of Christ.

Alterations and additions associated with the current use as a residence are not significant.

How is it significant?

The former United Methodist Free Church, 96 Pakington Street, St Kilda is of local historic and representative significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

The former United Methodist Free Church (later the Church of Christ) is historically significant, as one of the oldest church buildings in Port Phillip, which is associated with the early settlement of the residential areas east of St Kilda and Brighton roads. It is also significant as a rare surviving example of a United Methodist Free Church, which demonstrates the small Nonconformist denominations that existed prior to the Methodist church union in the early twentieth century. (Criteria A & B)

The building is of representative significance as example of an early Methodist church with a simple façade massed with a pediment and pilasters. (Criterion D)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

8. Building community life: 8.1 Maintaining spiritual life

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

8. Community life: 8.1 Spiritual life

History

Contextual history

Methodism was introduced into Victoria by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1838, but like Presbyterianism it was soon represented by several divisions. For example, in St Kilda the Wesleyan Methodist congregation held its first services in 1853 and erected its first church in Fitzroy Street between 1857 and 1858. Soon afterwards in 1859, a church was erected in Pakington Street for the United Methodist Free Church, which had formed that year with the union of the Arminian Methodists and the Wesleyan Methodist Association. A second Wesleyan Methodist Church opened in Chapel Street in 1877 on part of the land reserved for the town hall.

These divisions of Methodism united to form the Methodist Church of Australia in 1902 and, in 1977, the Methodist Church became part of the Uniting Church in Australia (Lewis 1991:10).

United Methodist Free Church Chapel, later Church of Christ

The United Methodist Free Church was established in 1857 with the union of the Arminian Methodists and the Wesleyan Methodist Association. The latter group had been formed by Methodists in 1836 in the large industrial cities of northern England who believed in lay rights rather than ministerial authority. The United Methodist Free Church was closer to Congregationalism than Wesleyan Methodism. In Australia it was strongest in Victoria, but it was much weaker than other Methodist groups with only forty-four churches in Victoria in 1901 (Lewis 1991:10; Bomford).

The chapel for the United Methodist Free Church in Pakington Street, St Kilda was built in either 1858 or 1859. According to Bomford, the foundation stone was laid on 29 March 1859 by a Mr. Orr on land donated by Henry Jennings. The congregation had been holding services in a private house but increasing numbers dictated a larger venue. However, a newspaper article records that the foundation stone 'for a new chapel and school-room' at St Kilda was laid by the Hon. H.S. Chapman Attorney-General on behalf of the 'United Methodist Free Churches' on Monday 9 August 1858 (*Melbourne Punch*, 12 August 1858, p.6).

The building was used as both a church and Sunday School and in 1867 18 children and four teachers attended the Intercolonial exhibition (*The Argus*, 23 February 1867, p.4).

In January 1870 it was reported that services at the church had 'lapsed for want of sufficient support' and a public meeting was held with a view of the services being conducted in the future under the auspices of the Wesleyan Church in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda. However, at the time the promises of support 'were not considered sufficient to warrant the opening of the church' (*The Telegraph, St Kilda, Prahran and South Yarra Guardian*, 22 January 1870, p.7). It is unclear whether services resumed after this time, but in 1876 a public meeting was held in the church to discuss the establishment of the new Wesleyan Church in Chapel Street, St Kilda (*The Argus*, 1 July 1876, p.6).

The United Methodist Free Church was still listed in the Sands & McDougall Directory in 1880, but by 1885 the building was occupied by the Church of Christ. The Church of Christ was a small denomination with both a British and American background. British migrants introduced the movement to Australia and the

first church in Victoria was founded in Prahran in August 1853. By 1901 there were 63 Church of Christ buildings in Victoria (Lewis 1991:12).

In 1922 the Church of Christ added a small gabled brick porch to the front of the building (BP). The Church of Christ congregation remained here in 1974 (SM), but by 1993 had sold the property (LV).

The building is now a private house.

References

Bomford, Janette, 'The spirit of St Kilda: Places of worship in St Kilda'.

<http://skhs.org.au/SKHSchurches/churches.htm>, viewed 19 July 2021

Cooper, John Butler, *The History of St. Kilda from its first settlement to a City and after 1840-1930*, City of St. Kilda, Melbourne, 1931, vol. I, pp. 353-54

Land Victoria (LV) Certificate of Title Vol. 2986 Fol. 138

Lewis, Miles (ed.), *Victorian Churches. Their origins, their story and their architecture*, National Trust, 1991

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) **Version 1, July 2020**

St. Kilda Council building permit no. 4859, 9 June 1922 (porch addition)

Description

A mid-nineteenth century, former United Methodist Free Church, on the north side of Pakington Street, west of Chapel Street. The former church is set back from the street boundary behind a garden, and the building is obscured from the street and a right-of-way by this garden and the high boundary fences on the site. The church has been adapted for re-use as a house.

The church is modest in scale and character. Symmetrically composed, it has a pediment that conceals the gable roof of the building. The original roofing has been replaced with corrugated galvanised steel sheeting. The walls of the church (front and sides) are rendered. The façade is divided into three bays by plain pilasters. A gabled porch with face brickwork and stone dressings, projects from the central bay. At centre, towards the top of the parapet, is a vent within a small pointed-arched opening. Pointed arched windows are on the façade to each side of the projecting porch and along the side elevations and the front of the porch.

Alterations and additions have been made to the rear of the building, but much of the early character of the building is still recognisable despite changes made to its fabric.

The building is in good condition.

Comparative analysis

According to Lewis (1991:10, 23) Methodism, like Presbyterianism, had no great architectural tradition when it was introduced to Australia, but by 1857 the Wesleyan Methodists had adopted the Gothic style for its churches. However, the design of Methodist churches was also influenced by the precept of John Wesley who directed that 'preaching houses' should be 'plain and decent' and no more expensive than necessary and because of this many Methodist churches were 'small and unpretentious buildings' (Lewis 1991:10). Some branches of Methodism like other Nonconformist churches adopted the Classical style. However, other Methodist churches also demonstrate an increasing acceptance of more elaborate and substantial Gothic style structures. Nevertheless, the Nonconformist tradition was usually still reflected by the internal layout with an emphasis on the pulpit and choir stall.

Miles Lewis in *Victorian Churches* identifies a sub-type of Classical style churches, which are described as 'Pilastrated or Stripped':

Often where there is not the full classical portico or temple front, an attempt is made to evoke it by using the correct forms and proportions, but with the details simplified. The roof usually follows the slope and profile of the classical pediment, and the columns are replaced by pilasters or flat strips project slightly from the wall. These represent columns, and each one may have a base and a capital.

This former Free Methodist church with its simple pedimented façade and pilasters is an example of this type and demonstrates the Classical influence upon early Nonconformist church design before the general adoption of the Gothic style, which was used, for example, at the Wesleyan Methodist Church built in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda in the same year (1858). The Fitzroy Street church was one of the first Wesleyan churches in the Gothic style in Melbourne. The pointed windows in this church also demonstrate the Gothic influence.

This is also one of the oldest church buildings (and building of any type) in Port Phillip. The oldest church in Port Phillip is Christ Church, St Kilda, which was commenced in 1854 (Citation 85). Other pre-1860 churches in Port Phillip are St Luke's Anglican Church, South Melbourne (1857, Citation 1009), Wesleyan Methodist Church, Fitzroy Street, St Kilda (1857-58, Citation 155), All Saints Anglican Church, St Kilda (1858-60, Citation 76), and St Mary's Catholic Church, St Kilda (commenced 1859, Citation 2104). These are all in the Gothic style.

Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

Recommendations

Retain in the Heritage Overlay with external paint controls.

Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *H07 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations, 2021*

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

David Bick with Wilson Sayer Core Pty. Ltd., *St Kilda Conservation Study Area 2*, 1984

Other images

