

Building: Mountview Uniting Church complex
former Presbyterian and Methodist
churches
Address: 561-63 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham
Significance:
Melway Map Ref: 48K8

Building Type: Church, hall, house
Construction Date: 1967(present church), 1888 (timber hall), 1929 or earlier
(Centre 81)
Architect: Earle Shaw and Partners (present church)
Builder: H.C. McEwan (present church)



Photo: 7/2001

Intactness:

G[x] F[x] P[]

Condition:

G[x] F[] P[]

Existing Heritage Listings:
Listings:

Victorian Heritage Register []
 National Estate Register []
 National Trust Register []

Recommended Heritage

Victorian Heritage Register []
 National Estate Register []
 Heritage Overlay Controls [x]

History

It is understood the Mountview Uniting Church was the first church '*designed and built exclusively for the joint use of a Methodist and Presbyterian congregation*' by the architects Earle, Shaw and Partners. The opening and dedication took place on 8th July 1967. Some of the buildings that make up the present day Mountview Uniting Church complex recall the histories of the Mitcham Presbyterian and Mitcham Methodist churches prior to this union, the most notable being the first churches built by the former congregations of each.

Methodism was practised by some of the earliest communities scattered east of Melbourne, its presence being formalised close by in Canterbury Road when the Mt. Pleasant church was built in 1865. The opening of the railway line to Ringwood in 1882 gave impetus to development in the district, especially the clay industry. It was in the Richards Street home of Edgar Edwardes Walker, manager of the Australian Brick Tile and Tessellated Tile Co., that the first Wesleyan services were held in Mitcham. And it was on a block of land carved from that company's 26 acre site that the first church was built in 1888. Its site on the corner of Whitehorse Road and Richards Street measured 80 by 145 feet and was bought for 240 pounds. The small timber church erected there for 295 pounds was opened on 6th May, an outpost of the Hawthorn Circuit and a neighbour of bottle shaped kilns.

Plagued by debt from the 1890s and a depleted congregation the church struggled for some time. However, in 1911-12, a new vestry was erected, but by the end of the Great War the little church building was inadequate. With the legacy of benefactor, lawyer and politician Robert Beckett, land was bought in Mitcham Road in 1918 and the church building was transferred and enlarged. It was reopened on 30th October 1921. Almost five decades later when Mitcham's paddocks and clay pits were overwhelmed by suburban housing removal of the church to its present site ensured a role for it in the life of the people of Mitcham.

Presbyterian presence in Mitcham was formally marked in 1920 when T.C.L. Goble, a missionary from Ringwood, conducted a church service at the Scout Hall in Britannia Street. Subsequently worship services were conducted in the Anglican church. Desiring a place of their own, a site measuring 80 by 126 feet was bought on the north west corner of Fellows Street and Victoria Avenue in 1924 from the Misses Wheeler. Five years later in 1929 a *general-purpose building constructed under the leadership of Mr.J.P. Priestley (later the Rev. J. Priestley)* was erected at a cost of 250 pounds. Furnishings were donated by the church members, the building being dedicated that

August. Anecdotal evidence is that the building, being prefabricated and iron framed, was imported.

The hard work of the establishment years generated activity and the addition of a vestry and kitchen. Services in the early years were conducted by the Ringwood Missioners however in 1934 the church was linked with the Blackburn church. Its minister C.T. Fletcher's strong leadership and teaching nurtured the congregation over the next decade. By then the Mitcham members were seeking a new site and it is understood Mrs. Francisco Schwerkolt of the pioneering German family offered land on the rise of her property which the Mitcham Presbyterians found most acceptable. This coincided with their means to become independent and support their own minister. In 1946 under the care of the Rev. J. Legge the church hall was moved to its new site in Doncaster East Road. Development of the site before union included an eastward extension and porch (1952), first stage of a brick hall erected (1956) and addition of kitchen and classrooms to the hall (1960). Presently the former church is taking on new life as Centre 81, a centre for the World Vision program LINC (Love in the Name of Christ) which provides help as it is needed to the community.

Description

This complex consists of the following elements:

- The present church, square on plan with a pyramidal internally timber lined roof, encircling colonnade defined by steel columns and highlight windows above the dark brown brickwalls. The roof tiles appear to be cement and there is a central fleche. A narthex adjoins on the west side connecting the church with offices and the hall of 1956.
- Mountview House at no. 563 Whitehorse Road, a representative timber framed Californian bungalow with posted verandah to the façade and a presumed addition at the west end.
- Centre 81. An iron framed hall and former church with metal trusses having angle iron uprights and girts and ripple iron panels, the gable ends being sheeted over with cement sheet. The windows are steel framed casements and there is a sympathetic rear addition. The north side wall has a former doorway, sheeted over, whilst the south side is substantially intact. The interior has been defaced.
- A timber framed former church with lead lit pointed head windows and recent porch presumably replacing an earlier structure since removed. Decorative half timbering above includes ogee motifs and quatrefoils on cement sheet backing. The rear end wall has a fixed gable end vent and various openings. Inside, the coved ceiling has circular vents, exposed metal ties to the roof and recent dado linings. The building has been cut into three parts and re-connected. It has sustained minor changes on the side elevations.
- Prominent mature pine tree at the Whitehorse Road/Doncaster East Road corner.

Comparative Examples

Christ Church Anglican Church, 485 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham (1958)
Anglican Church of the Ascension, 370-76 Blackburn Road, Burwood East.

Significance

The Mountview Uniting Church complex at nos. 561-63 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham, was established on this site as the Presbyterian Church in 1946. Contributory elements include:

- the present Centre 81 building, a prefabricated iron building obtained by the Presbyterians and first erected by them at the corner of Fellows Street and Victoria Avenue, Mitcham in 1929.
- the former Methodist church building of 1888, twice relocated and presumably re-erected at the present site c.1967.
- the present Church, designed by architects Earle, Shaw and partners and built by H.C. McEwan, the foundation stone being laid on 26th. February, 1967.
- a mature pine tree, possibly dating from the years when the land was in the ownership of Mrs. Francisco Schwerkolt. *- tree removed to permit.*

The complex is historically, socially and possibly technically significant.

It is historically significant (Criterion A) for the manner in which it incorporates not only the original churches of the Methodists and Presbyterians in Mitcham but also the present church jointly erected by the Methodists and Presbyterians some five years prior to union in 1972. It is understood to be the first church so erected. It is socially significant (Criterion G) for the value placed on the site as a centre of worship for members of the Uniting Church and its predecessors recalling their presence in the community since the mid nineteenth century. It is possibly technically significant (Criterion F) on account of the prefabricated iron former Presbyterian church of unknown origin but having the capacity to shed light on the history of portable buildings in Australia.

Source

Ward, A., Whitehorse Heritage Review 2001

References

- Jean Cornell, Gathered into One, Centenary Committee of Mountview Church, Mitcham, 1988, pp.1-40.
- Diane Sydenham, Windows on Nunawading, Hargreen Pub.Co./City of Nunawading, North Melbourne, 1990, pp.231.
- Nunawading & District Historical Society, ND 18 V2, Notes on the Mountview Uniting Church.
- Personal communication with parishioner Jess Brown, 25th. July 2001.

