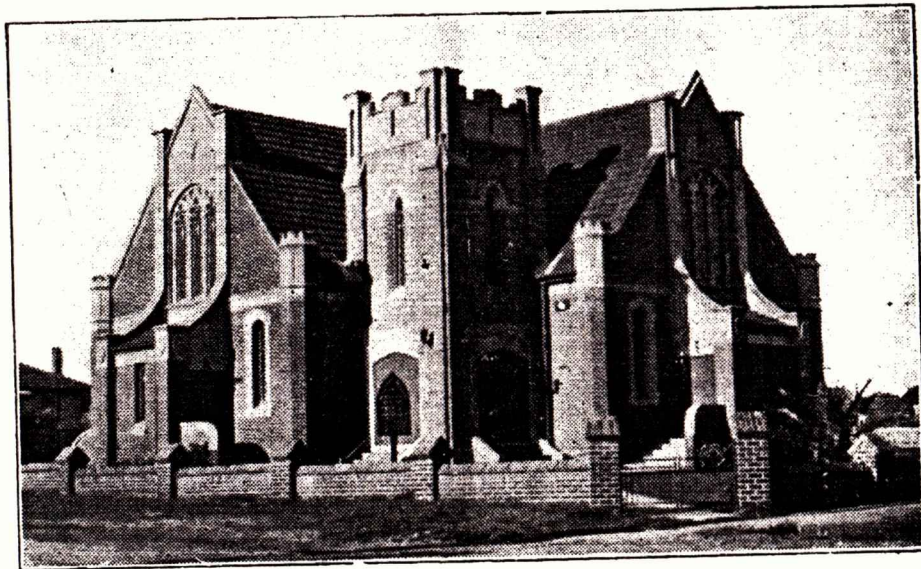

CENTRE ROAD, BENTLEIGH, METHODIST CHURCH

Helen Stanley 8 June 2017

Souvenir History

of

CENTRE ROAD, BENTLEIGH
METHODIST CHURCH



Centenary Celebrations

9th MAY — 17th MAY

1953

FOREWORD

WE are sure that the epitome in the following pages of the history of Bentleigh Methodism, covering a hundred years, will be appreciated by all who read it. Though it has been recently discovered that Methodism took root in Bentleigh a little more than a century ago, this year 1953 is nevertheless the appropriate year to celebrate the Centenary. Anniversaries are naturally special occasions in Church life, but how much more does a Centenary mean to us. For one thing, the thought of the many yesterdays drives us back far behind our days of pilgrimage to imagine what sort of men and women were the pioneers who, constrained by the love of Christ to establish a cause, handed on an organised church to their children and children's children. And a Centenary celebration means, as we think of those pioneers, that their works follow them. But what do we know of them? It is true many things in their walk, character and conversation have not been recorded, but not all has been lost, for some golden memories have been handed down from generation to generation. On the first gathering in connection with the Centenary services on Saturday, 9th May, reminiscences will be told, and a happy journey will be taken into the past life of our Church, far away in time leading on to our days.

THE CENTENARY HALL

The present buildings, used for Sunday School, youth activities, women's organisations, concerts and social gatherings, are quite inadequate to meet the demands of a growing Church. In considering this situation, two courses became evident—either to enlarge the building known as the School Hall, or to build

BENTLEIGH METHODISM

ITS ORIGIN AND HISTORY

EARLY Victorian Methodists were evangelists who, with a colony at their feet, went everywhere preaching the Gospel. Private dwellings were first used as meeting houses. It took many years to establish churches and organise the Methodist connexion as it operates to-day.

As early as 1835 Henry Reed, a Methodist layman, conducted the first service in Melbourne, his congregation consisting of "Henry Batman, Batman's brother, Buckley the escaped convict, and three Sydney blacks." The Rev. Joseph Orton, of Hobart, was the first Methodist minister to set foot on Victorian soil, and conducted a service on Batman's Hill on 25th April, 1836. A number of enthusiastic Methodists formed a small band to hold class meetings. Then in 1838 came that remarkable man, Mr. Charles Stone, with authority to preach from the Rev. Orton, who had returned to Hobart.

In 1845 Mr. Charles Stone settled in what was then known as "Little Brighton," and from that point the true history of Brighton Circuit may be said to date. He held cottage prayer meetings and met classes, besides prospecting the district in the interest of Christ's Kingdom. He was pioneer preacher at many places, and history records that **East Brighton**—now Bentleigh—can claim him as its founder.

Round about 1848, it is believed he preached in homes in this locality—two mentioned being those of Mr. Knight and Mr. Porter.

It is rather difficult to mark the definite date of the commencement of Centre Road Church on the present property, but Minutes of the British Conference of 1850 record in the property report the erection of a wooden building at East Brighton. These facts would make it appear that our Centenary celebrations are overdue. However, they are none the less thrilling, if belated, and one reviews the past history with thankfulness to God and gratitude to man.

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a new hall. In taking the long view, it was decided to launch an appeal in connection with the Centenary effort for funds to build a new hall which, when built and dedicated, will be known as the Centenary Hall. We believe that this decision will be received with general approval. The present generation in our Church of older and younger people has received from the labours of past generations a heritage, and surely this present generation will feel that the obligation devolves upon it to hand on in turn to the future a memorial of its faith and sacrificial service. "Freely ye have received, freely give."

In conclusion, let it be said that our earnest prayer is that the Centenary Services will bring to all heart stirrings, praise and thanksgiving to the Divine Head of the Church and the prayer that the Church may go from strength to strength.

W. J. WILLIAMS, Minister.



Centre Road Church, 1886.

CIRCUIT HISTORY

In 1852 appears the first mention in the Conference Station Sheet of East Brighton—a church in the Brighton Circuit. Prior to having their own church, members used to walk to worship at what was then known as Little Brighton, later Mill Street, and now Hawthorn Road, along a single furrow ploughed through the heavily timbered bush to show the way.

In 1892 Brighton Circuit was divided, and East Brighton was attached to South Brighton Circuit, along with Heatherton, Mordialloc, Beaumaris, Cheltenham and Mentone.

In 1894 the name of South Brighton was changed to that of Moorabbin.

In 1902 Methodist Union took place, adding the cause at Tucker Road to the Circuit, then in 1915 came another circuit division, and Moorabbin Circuit from that date consisted of Moorabbin, Bentleigh, Heatherton and Tucker Road.

In 1931 the name was changed by Conference to Moorabbin-Bentleigh Circuit, Hemming Street being established in 1931, and West Bentleigh in 1931 also.

Finally, in 1938, Conference made Bentleigh a separate circuit, with Rev. J. Rees Thomas its first superintendent minister. It consisted of Centre Road and Brewer Road, and later, in 1949, Tucker Road was transferred from Moorabbin, making three Bentleigh churches. A block of land has recently been purchased in Boundary Road for further circuit development.

CHURCH HISTORY

The first church building of 1850 was built of timber previously felled and stacked by pioneers on the block of land now occupied by the present Sunday School. The land was a gift, and the deed of conveyance for the same is now held in the Methodist Conference Office, Little Collins Street. The deed was not actually signed till 2nd January, 1855. It describes the block as 66 feet by 165 feet, bound by Centre Road on the south, by land owned by a Mr. Galloway on the west and north, and by land belonging to Cain Thorne on the east. The land was conveyed from one Edward Barker—an early class leader—to Rev. Jas. Bickford and the following trustees: Thomas Wellard, Benjamin Hawkins, Charles Stone, Alfred Hurlstone, William Sykes, Samuel Barnes and David Cameron. A list of subsequent trustees will be found at the end of this history.

The first church, or chapel, which stood between the present Sunday School and Kindergarten, though a veritable Bethel to the worshippers, was also draughty and often dripped with candle grease. Then gleaming kerosene lamps—the gift of Mr. Sinclair—dazzled the eyes of the children of the Sunday School, which had been established. The congregation grew and prospered, and on 3rd April, 1865, Mr. Charles Stone, at the trustees' request, laid the foundation stone of a new brick church. This was opened on 5th June of the same year by Matthew Burnett, who had been the means of the conversion of many in the Brighton Circuit in a glorious revival which swept the district. This church still stands and is the north portion of the present junior room of the Sunday School.

The next step in progress was to sell the original church for removal for the sum of £8, to collect £30, and to build the wooden Sunday School—the present primary room—at the rear of the church. It was declared open by Rev. C. Lancaster just prior to his leaving the Brighton Circuit in 1881. As a matter of fact, the building was not quite complete, but so keen were the folk to have Mr. Lancaster perform the ceremony that it was declared open, notwithstanding its unfinished appearance.

A larger church became necessary to house the growing congregation, and in 1892 an extension was added to the front, completing the set of buildings which now form the main Sunday School. Many now with us can tell of the numerous families regularly arriving by wagonette and spring cart to join in happy praise to God each Sunday.

In 1916 electric light was installed.

In 1922, to cope with the needs of the district, a well-equipped Kindergarten was built, and is fulfilling its purpose, with Miss Daisy Marriott as its valuable superintendent.

Next a church filled to capacity necessitated the erection of a new church. Mr. Caleb Porter bought and donated the block of land across Balmoral Avenue, valued at £300. The trustees, with commendable foresight, purchased adjoining blocks for the sum of £331. The foundation stone of our splendid new church was well and truly laid in June, 1928, by Mr. Robert Marriott Senior, the architect being Mr. Alex. Eggleston. On 1st December, 1928, the opening of the church took place. Mrs. Long, the oldest surviving member, cut the ribbon with gold scissors presented

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by the architect. The Rev. Dr. McCallum preached the opening sermon from the text, "This is none other than the house of God," other ministers taking part being Revs. J. Smith, W. Beckett, G. Wong, T. Pollard James and W. T. Laphorne, the pastor in charge at the time. A week of festivities sandwiched between two memorable Sundays—the unveiling of the soldiers' memorial window by Major-General Tivey, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., made the opening an event to be long remembered.

In 1950, the addition of a pipe organ enhanced the worship in this beautiful edifice. We might also mention here further memorial windows dedicated in 1949, one to the memory of fallen soldier members of World War II and two to the memory deeply revered and cherished in our church of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Marriott and Mr. and Mrs. William Marriott. Along with the name of Marriott are also lovingly remembered those of Simmonds, Long, J. L. Smith, Porter, Higgins, Leary, Joyce, Wawn, Strack, Matson, Pelling, Allnut and others—great souls overflowing with zeal for God's Kingdom and love for their fellow men. Throughout the years a noble band of local preachers have ably filled its pulpits along with a splendid succession of ministers.

Centre Road all through the years has been noted for hearty congregational singing, which for a long period has been led by a good choir under capable conductors and with faithful organists constantly at their posts. The choir history will be told in detail during the celebrations, though the names of Mr. Pelling, Mr. C. J. Long and Mr. R. H. Gill as past conductors, and as early organists Mr. C. J. Long, Miss Wawn and Miss Ruby Marriott conjure up memories of long service faithfully rendered.

If these buildings could but speak what tales they could tell—tales both grave and gay! May our Church carry on the tradition of the past and continue to influence the life of the community till the present buildings will need to be extended to embrace all who will come to worship here.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The histories of the Church and Sunday School are closely interwoven—the same zealous labourers happily working in both vineyards. When the S.S. centenary celebrations are held there will be a detailed account of its activities and progress under its surprisingly few superintendents over the century—Thos. Porter, J. Simmonds, Alf. Petersen, Wm. Marriott, R. W.

Marriott and T. R. Marriott. On Sunday the youth of the Church commence their day's activities at 10 a.m. with a splendid Christian Endeavour Society, with Mr. R. W. Marriott in charge. This is a fruitful recruiting ground for S.S. teachers and workers, about whom more will be heard during S.S. celebrations. Also we have the J.C.E. under capable leadership of Miss Glenda Burgess, and last the Tiny Tots' Church under guidance of Miss Betty Seaman and Miss Loris Cartwright, where the tiny tots have their session while parents worship in the Church.

WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES

No church history would be complete without a mention of its women's organisations. We are told that in the eighteen-fifties "sewing meetings were organised and funds raised for the purchase of material to line the walls of the draughty church," and doubtless over the years the ladies met various needs as they arose. In June, 1928, the present Ladies' Guild was formed, primarily to carpet the new Church and to work for a pipe organ. The first officers were: President, Mrs. L. Tait; vice-president, Mrs. C. Porter; secretary, Mrs. A. W. Higgins; treasurer, Mrs. T. R. Marriott. An account of the Guild's stewardship will be given at its Silver Jubilee Celebration, to be held as part of the Centenary festivities.

An older organisation is that of the W.A.O.M., which came into being in July, 1922, its first president being Mrs. Geo. Beckett, first secretary Mrs. R. W. Marriott, and first treasurer Miss Elsie Marriott. Miss L. Marriott has held office as secretary since 1923, and Miss E. Marriott treasurer since 1925. This is a very active Auxiliary for our Overseas Missions.

The Home Circle for young married women commenced in July 1948, under the presidency of Mrs. L. S. Saunders, Mrs. Abel being vice-president, and Mrs. Monson secretary. It is proving a very helpful and happy meeting place for its members.

METHODIST MEN'S SOCIETY

The Methodist Men's Movement has an active branch under the presidency of Mr. A. Finlayson, with Mr. Fred Shattock a most efficient and energetic secretary.

YOUNG PEOPLE

The physical welfare of our youth is catered for with gymnasiums, cricket and tennis, while the Young People's Fellowship is fostering their cultural as well as spiritual growth. A monthly Youth Choir, too, gives them an active place in Church life and service.

THE PARSONAGE

In 1940 the parsonage was erected by Mr. E. Beach at a cost of £1500, and dedicated at an interesting ceremony by the Rev. D. Lewis, Mrs. J. L. Smith having the honour of turning the key in the door.

Ministers and Home Missionaries who have gone out from the Church—

Pastor George Beckett—for 43 years honoured Conference Evangelist.

Rev. Fred. C. Wilms—for nine years Inland Missioner in Central Australia, now stationed at Mt. Barker, South Australia.

Rev. Ralph Beckett—at present at Queenstown, Tasmania.

Mr. Bob Ganderton—Home Missionary at Derby, Western Australia.

As a matter of interest we record that the first wedding ceremony performed in Centre Road Church was a double wedding, the contracting parties being Miss Ruth Simmonds—Mr. J. Higgins and Miss Katie Simmonds—Mr. F. Hollier. The first wedding in the new church was that of Miss Katie Brewer and Mr. Ern Beach in 1928.

In compiling the history of Centre Road Church the name of the present treasurer of the trust, Mr. E. J. Sonsee, should be put on record for his years of faithful service, his masterly handling of trust accounts and concise annual statements for past eighteen years. No doubt his Centenary report will reveal the healthy state of church finance.