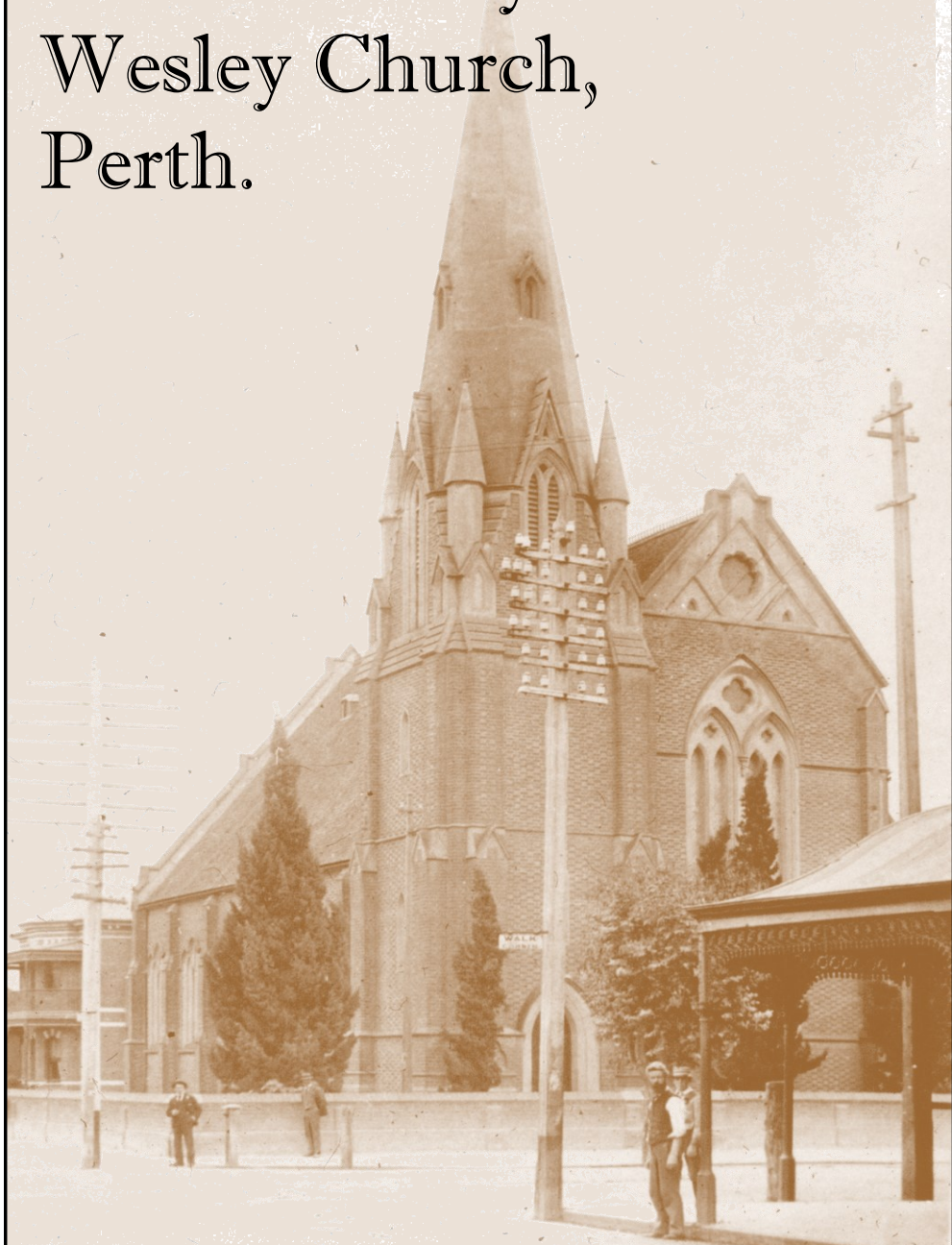


A brief history of
Wesley Church,
Perth.



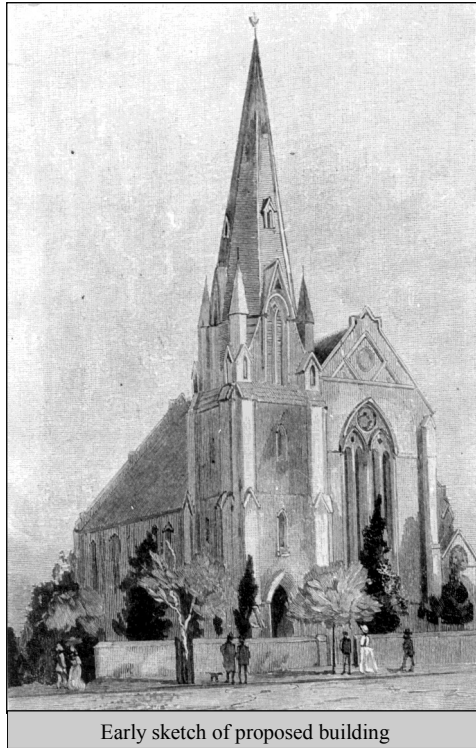
The building known as Wesley Church was built in 1870 for the Methodist congregation of Perth. The first Methodists arrived in the Swan River Colony on February 3rd, 1830, aboard the *Tranby*, to found a small religious community on a peninsula of fertile land, 4 miles upstream from Perth, where the present Perth suburb of Maylands is situated. The group was led by Joseph and John Wall Hardey.

In June 1866, the Reverend T C Laurance (who was stationed in the Geraldton area but maintained close ties with Perth) wrote in a letter to London, *Mr Lowe will have*

mentioned, I daresay, that we are now about to erect a new and larger Sanctuary'. A site for the new Church located at the corner of Hay and William Streets Perth, was purchased from Mr James Inkpen at

a cost of £400.

A letter asking for donations towards the construction of a new church was circulated in June 1867 stating: *'My Dear..., The Wesleyans of Perth having for considerable period found that their Chapel is not sufficiently large for the Congregation, many sittings having been*



Early sketch of proposed building

inquired for which could not be supplied, the Trustees have decided on building a Church at the corner of Hay and William Streets which will be commodious for the congregation and an ornament to the Town. The new structure will contain over 600 sittings. The land purchased for the site of the intending

building has cost £400. The Trustees confidently believing that the important object they have in view in erecting a large and beautiful Church will advance the moral and spiritual interests of the people of Perth and its vicinity, now respectfully and urgently appeal to

you...for your sympathy and aid in this important undertaking. Donations will be thankfully received by W Lowe, G Shenton and Joseph Hardey'.

The new Church was the third Methodist place of worship to be built in the forty years in which the denomination had been established in the Swan River Colony. The first, the Subscription Chapel, was built in 1834 and later became a Sunday School building. The second, the Centenary Chapel, was built in 1840.

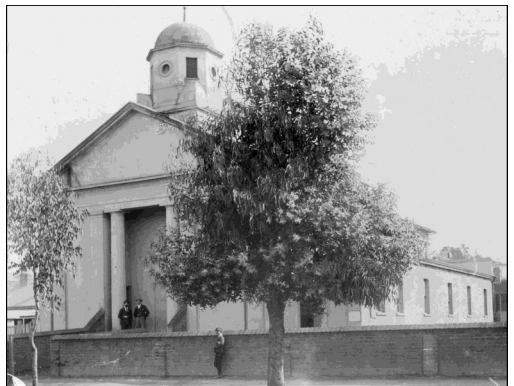
Wesley Church was designed by Richard Roach Jewell, an architect, circuit steward and Church member. Jewell arrived in the Swan River Colony in 1852 and was Clerk of Works of the Colonial Establishment. His first building was the Perth Gaol and Courthouse (1853-56). He would remain in office until 1885 and was responsible for the design of a number of prominent Perth buildings

including: Pensioner Barracks (1863); the west wing of the Central Government Offices (1874); The Cloisters (1856); the extensions to the Roman Catholic Pro-Cathedral convent buildings (1860s); and alterations to Perth Town Hall (1870).

Jewell designed Wesley Church in the fashionable Victorian Academic Gothic style of architecture, a style which he also successfully adapted in his other buildings. This Gothic style became much favoured for new buildings throughout Australia and other parts of the British Empire from the 1850s to the 1870s – not only for churches, but also for other public buildings from which the past associations of



Subscription Chapel 1834



Centenary Chapel 1840



Looking east along Hay Street from Wesley Church to Town Hall

spirituality, divinity and God-given power were useful symbols in establishing authority. He submitted a plan for Wesley Church consisting of the nave, chancel and bell tower with a tall and elegant spire, which was accepted with one alteration, the relocation of the bell tower from the north-east side to the south-east side.

The contract for laying the foundations of the church went to James Brittain, whose quote for

this part of the building was £200 and 3 shillings. The foundation stone was laid on 25th October 1867 by Governor J.S. Hampton. The Church and spire were built by William Buggins at a cost of £394. The floor was laid by J. Halliday at 18 shillings per square of 100 super feet. Plastering was done by J. Platt for £294. The roof was erected by H. Cutting for £345.

The Church was opened on Sunday 10th April, 1870 with Revd

Lowé preaching in the morning, Revd Traylen in the afternoon and Revd Laurence in the evening.

The offerings on the day totaled £70 with some members later making gifts of watches and jewellery to the sum of £150.

The total cost of the building was estimated to be in the vicinity of £3,000 — a considerable sum for a Church membership of 138 in total with a quarterly income of little over £66. An appeal was launched to raise the funds.

George Shenton, who suggested that the name of the Church be Wesley Church, donated £1,000 and Joseph Hardey contributed

£500 pounds. Between them they contributed to over half the total cost of the church.

Perth in the mid-nineteenth century was a small town and the people of influence were known by the whole community. Both the Hardey and Shenton families were part of the Swan river Colony's fledgling gentry. The Hardey family had prospered since 1830 with the lands they held being highly productive and the family was able to extend its land holdings in the colony significantly. John Wall Hardey became a member of the Legislative Council. George Shenton had established himself as a general merchant. He had been an



The extensions of 1880



An internal view soon after World War I

agitator for the acceptance of convicts to the colony and grown rich provisioning the convict establishment. By 1870, he had a fine house in Perth and political influence. His son, George Shenton Jnr would later become Lord Mayor of Perth.

In 1880, a clergy vestry, choir vestry and organ loft were added to the Church at a cost of £385. By the mid 1890s, the influx of people during the gold rush meant that seating in the Church needed to be increased. In 1896 alterations and additions to the

Church were made including the north-east tower (which buried the original foundation stone), the side galleries and the ceiling to the nave and the south-west porch. The alterations were at a cost of £1,150 and the architect was J J Talbot Hobbs. Hobbs was a prominent Perth based architect, who had migrated to Perth in 1887. By 1896, he had been responsible for a number of buildings including the Princes Building and the Masonic Lodge in Perth, domestic buildings and additions to St Albans Church in Highgate. Further additions made to the northern side of the

chancel by Hobbs, Smith and Forbes at the turn of century, were later demolished in 1974.

The Meckering earthquake of October 1968 caused major damage to a number of buildings in Perth. It shook Wesley Church and structural cracks appeared in the steeple. A decision was made to demolish the steeple but when about 30ft was removed, the remainder of the structure seemed quite secure and so a copper cone was placed on the top to replace the damaged section. The bell was removed from the tower as it was thought the structure too weak to support its weight. The bell was, instead, mounted outside the Church on a concrete stand. Concrete paving was put in place around the building to assist in drainage and to provide more stability to the soil. Repairs totaled nearly \$10,000.

In 1974, redevelopment commenced on the north-west and south-west sides of the Church site and the Wesley Centre was built. Turn of the century additions to the northern side of the chancel by Hobbs, Smith and Forbes were demolished opening up the approach to Wesley Arcade.

Wesley Arcade opened before Christmas in 1975 and the centre as a whole opened in May 1976. During these developments the small chapel located at the north west corner of Wesley Church was added.

Wesley Church continued to be used as an active centre of worship and in 1977 the Methodist congregation joined the Uniting Church of Australia.

In 1983, a report on the condition of Wesley Church by Ron Bodycoat, showed that major restoration was necessary to the lower sections of external brick walls of the south-east and north facades, as well as the



Wesley Arcade and Tower soon after opening

gables, parapets and high parts of the tower brickwork which had fretted. The Restoration Appeal was launched in 1985, through the National Trust of Australia (WA) with a target of \$150,000 - of which \$62,000 was allocated to restoring the brickwork; \$22,000 for plaster; \$29,000 for painting; \$13,000 for repairs to glass and plumbing; and \$24,000 for electrical work. Funds were raised and the restoration work completed mid-1987.

During 2002 the congregation decided to engage in alterations to the interior of the building to make it more suitable for current liturgical use, and to create an internal arrangement that was more expressive of contemporary expectations for buildings accessed by the general public and used for a range of events.

Today, Wesley Church is the place of worship for a thriving congregation of all ages, as well as the spiritual home for many WA families which have an association with Wesley Church through baptism, marriage and funeral services. Each generation of the Church places its stamp on the

character and fabric of the building it uses for worship. Wesley will, therefore, continue to change as eras unfold, each with their own particular characteristics. This is the reality for buildings that are more than museums to an age long gone. As long as there is a living congregation of people, Wesley Church will continue to be a living building, built to the glory of God and dedicated to proclaiming a God of love who touches peoples lives, and who motivates those so touched to be part of the transformation of the world.



Wesley Church 1950s