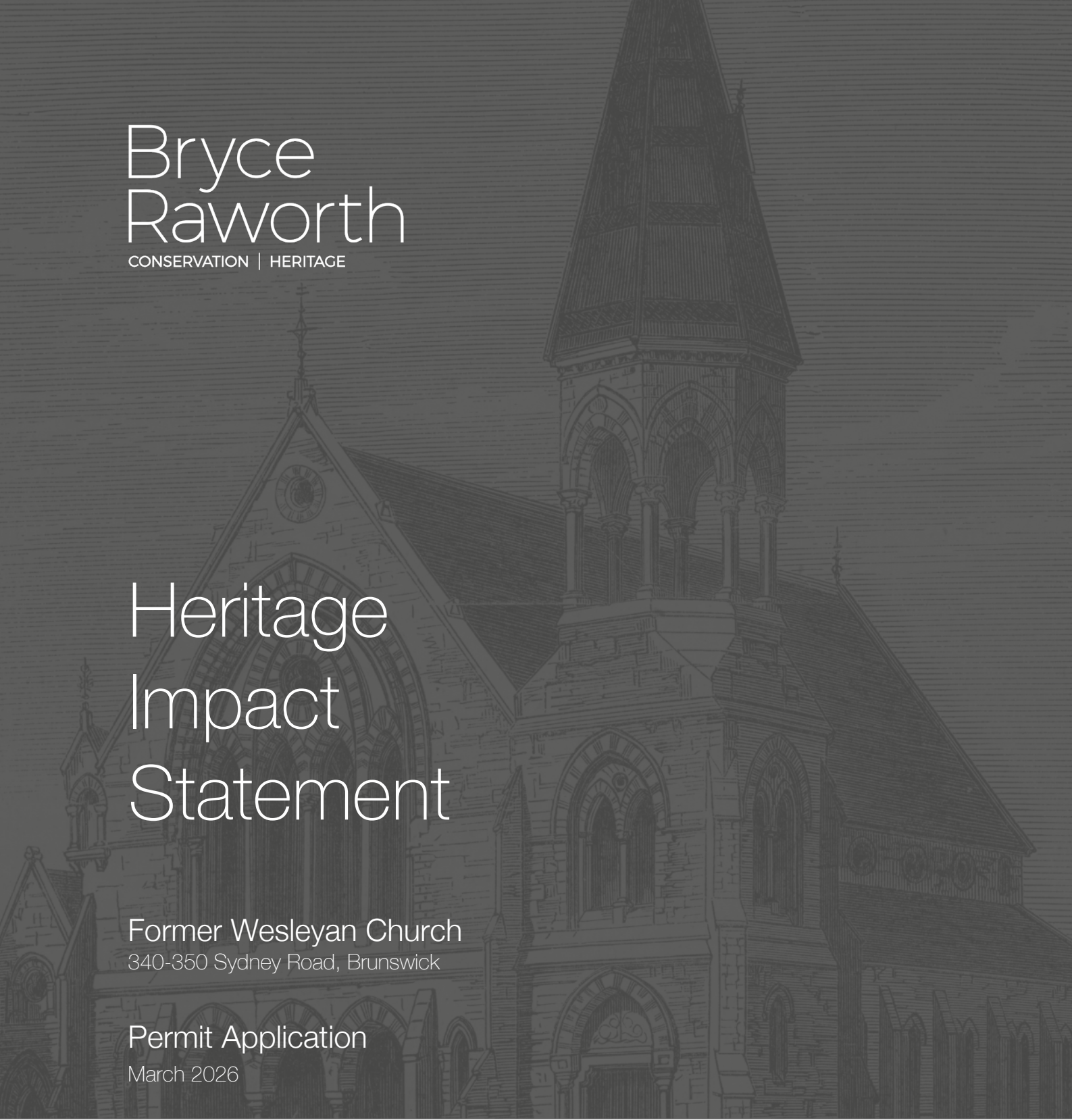




Bryce
Raworth

CONSERVATION | HERITAGE

Heritage Impact Statement

Former Wesleyan Church
340-350 Sydney Road, Brunswick

Permit Application
March 2026



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1.0 Introduction

The following heritage impact statement was prepared on behalf of the owner of the former Wesleyan Church, 340-350 Sydney Road, Brunswick (VHR H1144). It concerns the application for adaptive reuse of the church including a rear addition and landscaping works.

This report comments on whether the proposed works are appropriate in character and detail, and acceptable in terms of their impact upon the significance of the registered place.

2.0 Methodology

This heritage impact statement has been prepared with regard to the *Burra Charter* and its guidelines, as amended in 2013, and in general accordance with *Heritage Victoria Guidelines for Preparing Heritage Impact Statements* (Made and published under s19(1)(f) of the Heritage Act 2017 in June 2021). It responds to several key matters that are set out on page 3 of that document:

- *Why the place is of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria*
- *What options were considered in developing the proposal*
- *What impact (positive and/or negative) the proposed works will have on the significance of the place*
- *If a negative impact is proposed, why the proposed option was chosen and why other more sympathetic options were not feasible, and*
- *What measures are proposed to minimise and mitigate negative impacts.*

3.0 Sources of Information

The analysis below draws upon multiple site visits and a review of the Victorian Heritage Register documentation for the subject site. Reference is also made to the following documents and historical sources:

- *Heritage Victoria Policy: Reasonable or economic use - Relevant matters for the consideration of section 101(2)(b) of the Heritage Act 2017*
- *Principles for considering change to places in the Victorian Heritage Register Made and published under s19(1)(f) of the Heritage Act 2017*
- Heritage Victoria pre-application advice (dated 12 December 2024)



4.0 Site History

The present church building was erected in 1872 to the design of architects Fox & Oakden of Ballarat for the Wesleyan Church. Thomas Wilkinson, an early Brunswick landowner, gave this land to the Wesleyan Church in 1841. Wilkinson, often referred to as the 'father of Brunswick' in reference to his position as the first President of the Municipality of Brunswick, purchased this allotment as part of a syndicate with Rev. E P Stone. The first church erected on the site in the early 1850s was a modest building measuring 30 x 20 ft (9 x 6 metres).

Percy Oakden won the commission to design for a new church in a competition in 1871, and apparently used it as the vehicle to move from his Ballarat partnership of Fox & Oakden to join Leonard Terry in Melbourne at the end of 1873. The church was formerly opened on 6 February 1873, and is described in detail in a contemporary newspaper article as follows:

The building, which is of brick on a stone foundation, is of elegant design and finish, both externally and internally. The front elevation is an exceedingly chaste design, of elegant proportion and rich in color; the dark red bricks of which the front is principally composed beautifully harmonise with those of a lighter color, which are arranged in patterns, used as quoins or in the arches over the openings. Externally the front is divided into three compartments, the centre one corresponding with the width of the main building ...

...The entrance to the church is by a flight of steps in the centre compartment, leading under three massive arches, supported on iron columns which sustain the main front wall, to an open arcade, from which entrance is gained by lobbies on the north and south side of the interior. Internally, the appearance of the church is most striking feature: the novel arrangement of the seats and mode of ornamentation are such as at once to commend themselves for their utility and beauty. The interior of the church measures 72 by 63, accommodation being provided for 650 persons at present, the arrangements for seating being perfect. The floor slopes for about two-thirds of the distance from the front towards the pulpit, the remainder being level, so that the seats, which are disposed in curves, with the pulpit as a centre, rise gently, and enable every member of the congregation to see the preacher with the greatest ease. The church internally is divided into nave and north and south aisles, the aisles being separated from the nave by arches of colored bricks rising from iron columns with bronzed foliated capitals. These arches support the clerestory wall, which is pierced on either side with circular windows at a high elevation, thus providing for ample ventilation. The windows in the aisles are arranged in couplets, and they, as well as all the others throughout the building, are glazed with cathedral glass with stained glass margins. The principals of the roof spring from corbels of elegant form with rich mouldings, which are continued along the walls. The pulpit platform and communion rail are, like most other fittings, of polished cedar and wrought-iron and present a most rich appearance.¹

¹ *Illustrated Sydney News and New South Wales Agriculturalist and Grazier*, 19 March 1873, p.5.

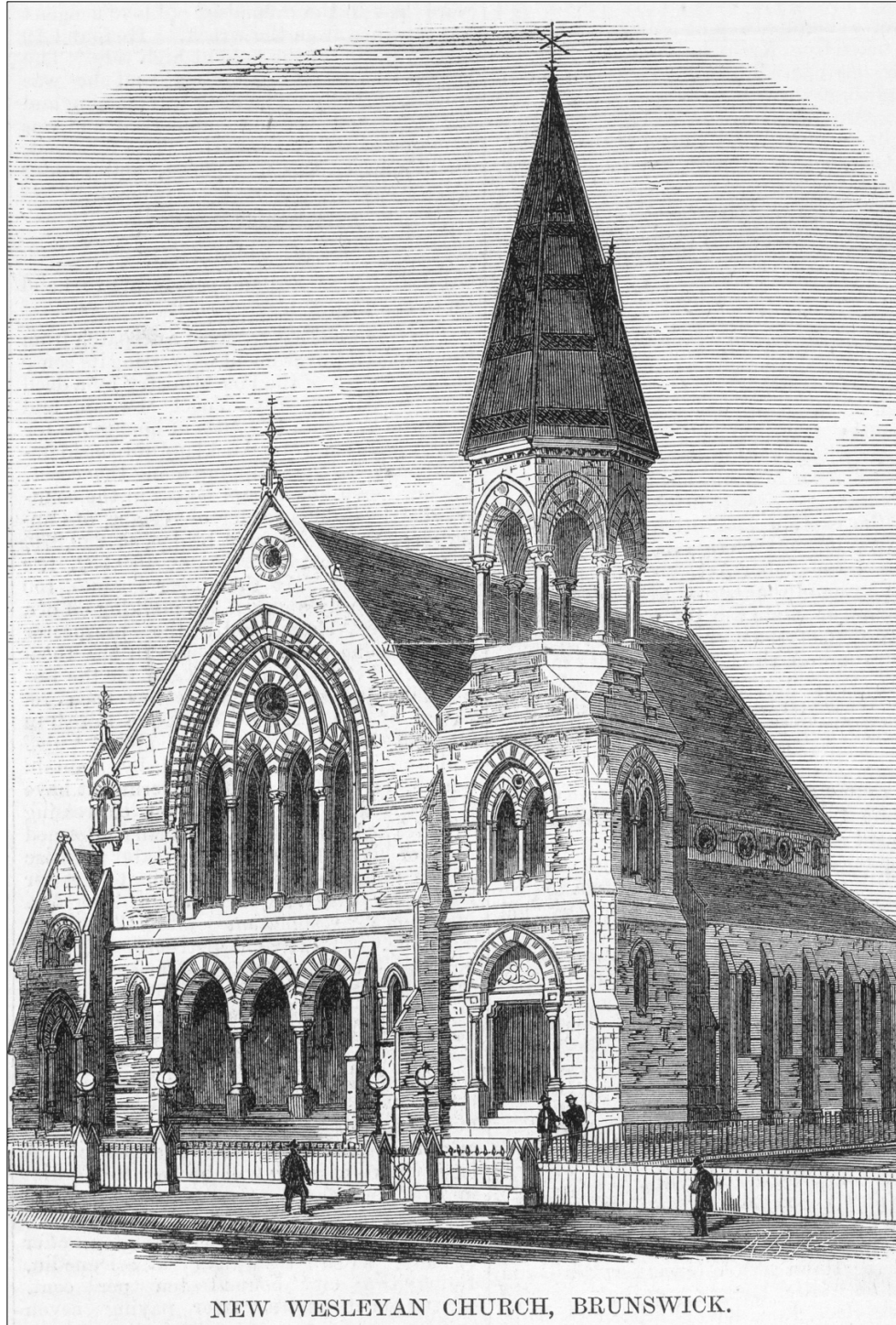


Figure 1 An 1873 illustration of the Wesleyan Church, Brunswick.
Source: State Library of Victoria.

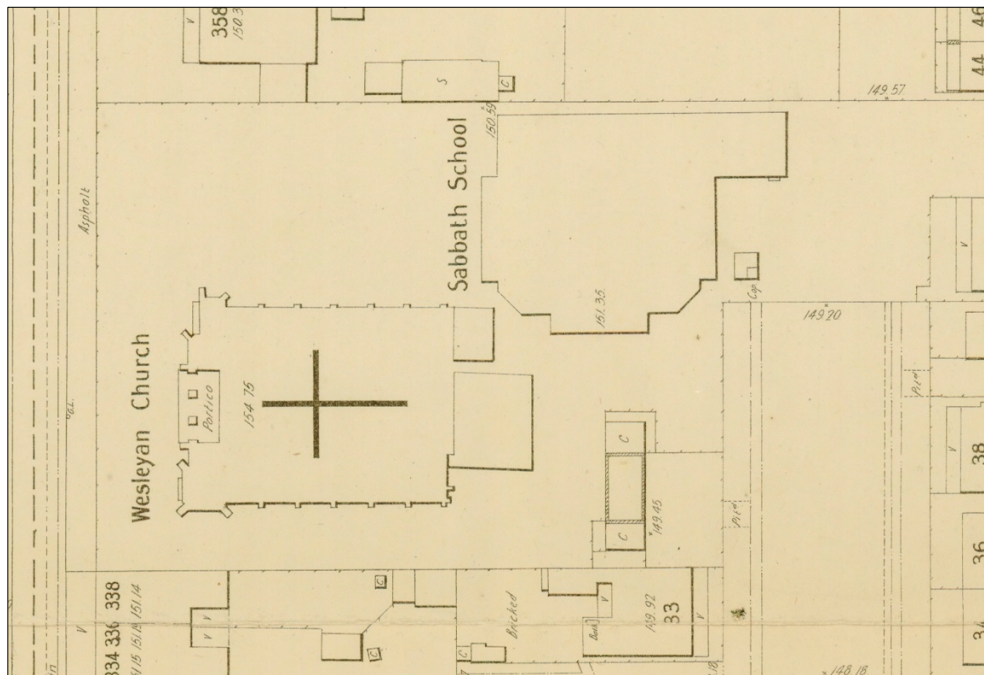


Figure 2 Extract from a 1905 MMBW plan showing the layout of the church site. Note that David Street did not extend north past the church at this time.
Source: State Library of Victoria.

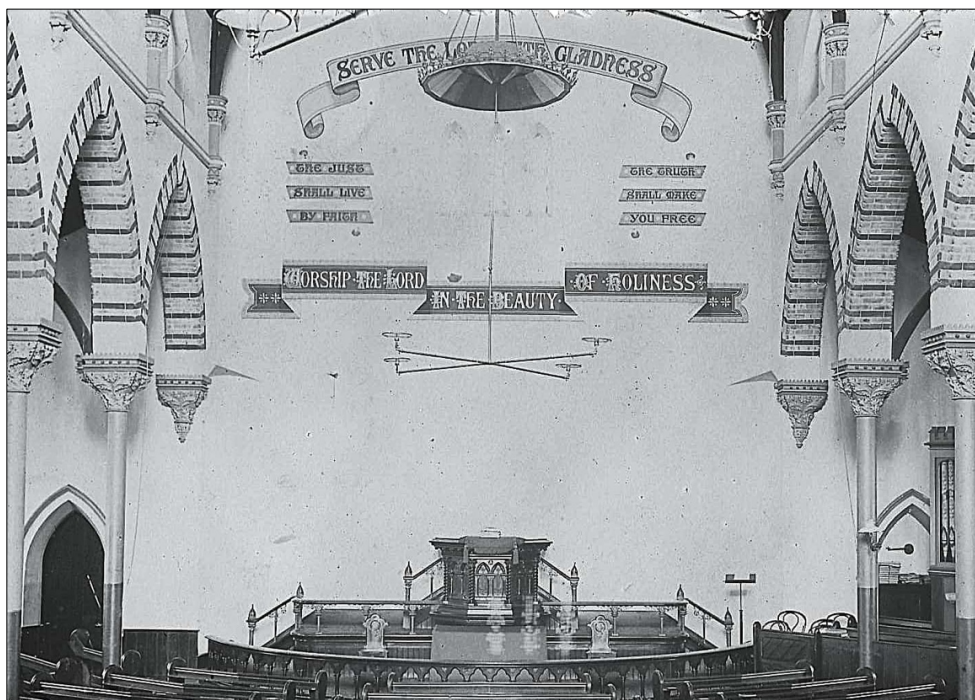


Figure 3 Undated (pre-1942) photograph of the church interior looking east towards the altar.
Source: Organ Historical Trust Australia

In 1884 a Fincham organ was installed in the church after having been relocated from Holy Trinity Church, Balaclava.²

A Sunday School was built to the rear of the church site in 1887 and opened in 1888. The design was innovative, with classrooms placed on two levels of a 'U' plan, so that the opening of a series of folding doors allows all the rooms to all look onto a centre stage. The school was conceived as a 'model' by the church and its young architect Alfred Dunn. The resulting space resembles a galleried theatre. A vestry was added to the rear north-east corner of the church in 1894. The original Fincham organ was rebuilt in 1942.³

The church site was occupied the Sydney Road Community School from 1972 until 2023, subsequent to the sale of the property.

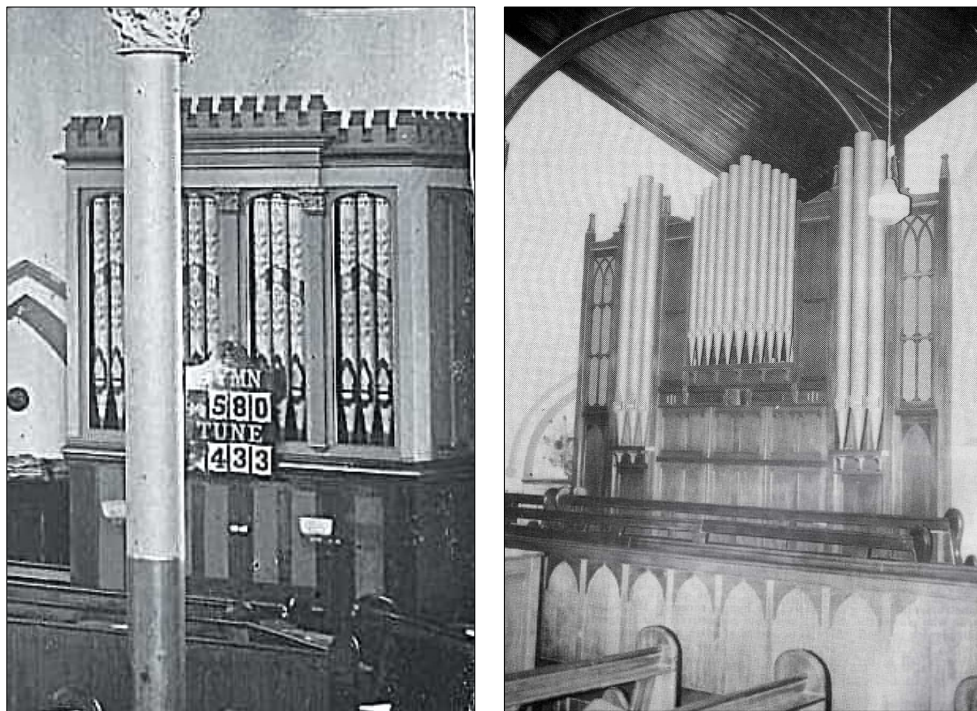


Figure 4 Undated photograph of the original Fincham organ (left) and the organ as rebuilt in 1942 (right). Source: Organ Historical Trust Australia

² *Methodist Church [sic] Brunswick Technical Documentation*, John Maidment (Organ Historical Trust Australia), September 2023, p.4.

³ *Methodist Church [sic] Brunswick Technical Documentation*, John Maidment (Organ Historical Trust Australia), September 2023, p.4.

5.0 Description

The former Wesleyan Church is located on the east side of Sydney Road, between Dawson Street to the south and Albert Street to the north. David Street is situated to the east (rear) of the property. The church is setback approximately 10 metres from the Sydney Road frontage behind an unfenced asphalt paved forecourt. The yard to the north side of the church has recently been cleared of trees and portable school buildings.

The former Wesleyan Church is Gothic revival style building constructed of polychrome brick with a gabled slate roof, pierced by a number of dormer roof vents, and rendered copings and details. The building is distinguished by the quality of its brickwork, predominately brown with cream and red contrasts in diaper work and around openings. The west facade of the church, facing Sydney Road, is dominated by a series of four pointed arched windows at first floor level, enclosed within a large pointed arch with red and cream brick voussoirs. At ground floor level is a triple arched entrance loggia, which is flanked by brick buttresses with rendered copings, which continue around the north and south elevations of the building.

The tower on the south-west corner is terminated by an open belfry with Gothic arcading and a slate spire with gabled vents. On the north-west corner, balancing the asymmetrical composition, is another much smaller open belfry and a small gabled secondary entrance with pointed arched openings. Between the buttresses on the side elevations are paired lancet windows. The rear (east) elevation has weatherboard infill to the gable end and plain face brickwork with nib walls that appear to have been created with the intent of allowing for further expansion of the church.

The church interior is divided into a central nave with aisles to the north and south sides defined by a cast iron colonnade with Venetian Gothic style polychrome brick arches and circular clearstory windows. The nave and aisles have a raked timber floor with timber pews arranged in a radial plan form orientated towards the pulpit.

The church is substantially intact with few changes made during the occupancy by the Sydney Road Community School except for an awning on the south elevation and partition walls in the north-east corner of the church, which have since been removed. The roof was recently reclad in slates and conservation works have commenced under a permit to address the dilapidated condition of the fabric.



Figure 5 The Sydney Road façade.



Figure 6 The north elevation.



Figure 7 (left)

The south elevation looking west towards the belfry.

Figure 8 (right)

The south elevation looking east. Note the modern canopy above the original door.



Figure 9

The rear elevation showing the 1894 vestry addition to the right.



Figure 10 *The rear of the church viewed from David Street. The former Model School is partially visible to the right.*



Figure 11 *View from the northern aisle looking east towards to the altar.*



Figure 12 View from within the nave looking west.



Figure 13 Painted banners on the east wall.



Figure 14 (left) The pulpit.



Figure 15 (right) The 1942 organ, located in the south-east corner of the church.



Figure 16 (left) Painted banner above the door to the north wall.



Figure 17 (right) Painted banner above the door to the south wall.

6.0 Heritage Listings

Victorian Heritage Register

The former Wesleyan Church complex has been identified as a place of state significance and is included on the Victorian Heritage Register as VHR Place No.H1144. The extent of registration is described as follows:

1. *All of the buildings known as the former Wesleyan Church and Model Sunday School marked B-1 and B-2 respectively on plan 604407 endorsed by the Chair, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council.*
2. *The land marked L-1 on Plan 604407, being the land described in Certificates of Title Volume 5712 Folio 324 and Volume 982 Folio 391 endorsed by Chair, Historic Buildings Council and held by the Director, Historic Buildings Council.*

[Victoria Government Gazette No. G3 25 January 1996 p.220]

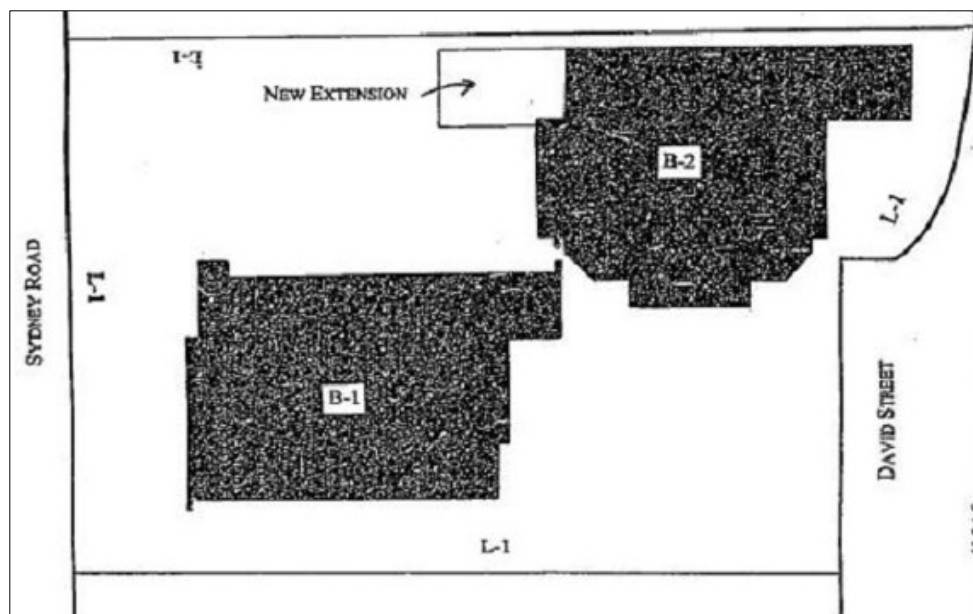


Figure 18 Site plan showing the extent of registration.

Merri-bek Council

The former Wesleyan Church complex is subject to an individual Heritage Overlay 340-350 Sydney Road, Brunswick – Former Wesleyan Church and Model Sunday School (HO157). It is nonetheless recognised that the Responsible Authority regarding heritage matters within the extent of registration is Heritage Victoria, and that the City of Merri-Bek will have a role as a referral body.

The site is located within the environs of the Sydney Road Precinct (HO149).

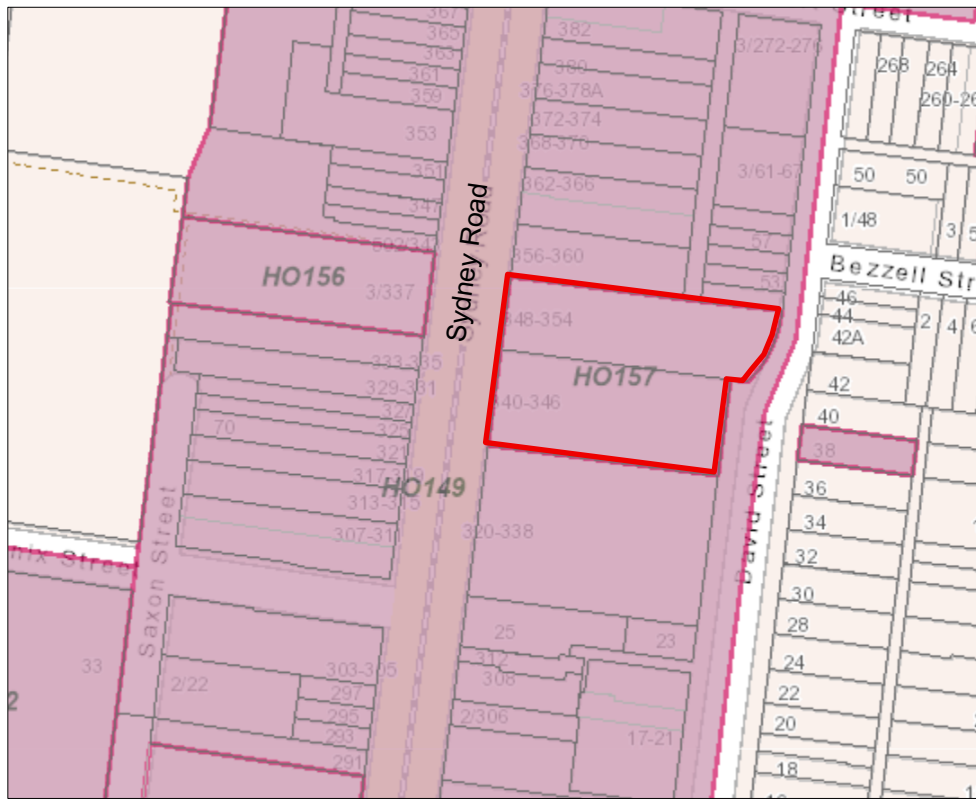


Figure 19 Map showing the subject site (HO157) located within the Sydney Road precinct (HO149).
Source: mapshare.vic.gov.au

7.0 Significance

As noted above, the former Wesleyan Church is included on the Victorian Heritage Register. Heritage Victoria's Statement of Significance provides a detailed appreciation of the significance of the place, and this is provided in full below:

What is significant?

The former Brunswick Wesleyan Church was built to a design of Percy Oakden in 1872. The building exterior is a towered Gothic Revival design in the French manner, however the polychrome brickwork demonstrates an Italian influence. The church houses a notable organ and wall-painted banners typical of Italian Gothic (or Romanesque) Revival manner often used in secular schools of the period. The interior of the former Sunday School is a grand two-level space, surrounded on three sides by a cast-iron balustraded gallery from which the classrooms radiate with stepped gallery floors.

How is it significant?

The former Brunswick Wesleyan Church and Model Sunday School are significant for architectural and historical reasons.

Why is it significant?

The former Brunswick Wesleyan Church is architecturally significant as an excellent and largely intact example of the work of the distinguished architect Percy Oakden. The building was the first of a series of polychrome churches designed by Oakden, later Terry and Oakden, and it serves as an outstanding representation of polychromatic architecture in Victoria. In 1886 the church trustees engaged Percy Oakden and Leonard Terry to design the Model Sunday School, however the trustees could not afford the tendered price and a young architect, Alfred Dunn, was engaged in their place. The Model Sunday School is architecturally significant for its consciously innovative design which brought together contemporary architectural philosophies and the teaching doctrines of the Wesleyans. The distinctive gallery was designed to bring about the best possible combination of acoustics and vision and the radiating classrooms have their foundations in the panopticon principle which promoted supervision under separation.

The former Brunswick Wesleyan Church and Model Sunday School are historically significant for their integral associations with the Wesleyans and as monuments symbolising the Wesleyans' devotion to their church. The Model Sunday School is of historical significance for its ability to express the innovation that the Wesleyans brought to Christian teaching methods.

8.0 Proposal

The proposal is for the church to be adaptively reused as commercial office space. To accommodate this use, most of the timber pews will be removed and a raised, level platform floor erected over the original raked floor to the western half of the nave. The organ and adjacent timber pews in the south east corner of the church will be retained, along with the altar platform and timber pulpit.

A single-storey addition is to be constructed to the rear of the church to accommodate toilets and a store room. The addition has face brick walls with a parapet concealing a metal deck roof with pressure flashing to the existing church wall. An existing arched niche in the east wall of the church will be converted into a doorway to provide access to the addition. A new opening will also be created in the south wall of the 1880s vestry addition to connect to the store room in the addition. External changes are otherwise limited to a small gable roofed canopy over the south entrance door and DDA compliant handrails to the front steps with tactile ground surface indicators.

The existing paved front setback is retained for use as staff and visitor carparking with improved landscaping including a screen of plantings to either side of the driveway crossover. The curtilage to the north and south sides of the church is to be re-landscaped with soft beige coloured concrete paving, areas of lawn and garden beds. The palm tree on the south side of the church is to be retained. The southern outdoor area will be accessed via new double leaf gates in the existing brick wall. The northern outdoor area is to be enclosed by a visually permeable 1.8 metre high metal fence. A solid 1.8 metre high fence will be used to conceal a service yard at the rear north-east corner of the church.

9.0 Heritage Impact Assessment

As noted, this heritage impact statement has been prepared in general accordance with Heritage Victoria's guidelines for such assessments. It seeks to respond to the five key questions, as set out in the guidelines:

- *Why the place is of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria*
- *What options were considered in developing the proposal*
- *What impact (positive and/or negative) the proposed works will have on the significance of the place?*
- *If a negative impact is proposed, why the proposed option was chosen and why other more sympathetic options were not feasible, and*
- *What measures are proposed to minimise and mitigate negative impacts.*

Why the place is of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria

The former Brunswick Wesleyan Church is considered to be architecturally significant as an excellent and largely intact example of the work of architect Percy Oakden and as an outstanding representation of polychromatic design. The place has historical significance for its association with Wesleyans and as an expression of their devotion to their religious denomination.

The proposal will not remove or diminish these significance attributes. The external and internal polychrome brickwork remains unaltered and the overall intactness remains high – such that the building will continue to be appreciated as a fine example of late Victorian ecclesiastical architectural. The associations with the Wesleyan Church could be further explained with simple interpretative signage on the Sydney Road frontage.

The proposal will enhance the church's status as a key building in the surrounding heritage overlay streetscape, with a new use that augments the historically significant role of Sydney Road as a major commercial thoroughfare.

What options were considered in developing the proposal?

The options for proposed adaptive reuse were developed with regard for Heritage Victoria's pre-application advice to allow for retention raked floor, to minimise alterations to original significant fabric, and to avoid new structures that obscure significant fabric. The proposal was also conceived with the intent of maintaining the church interior as a single open place space.

More generally, there are few viable new uses for the place other than commercial office space. Other options such a performing arts space or live music venue would likely require a far more substantial degree of change to satisfy mandatory building code requirements, including fire safety and egress, as well as upgrades to meet current standards of patron amenity.

By way of comparison, a far greater extent of internal change occurred as part of the award winning conversion of the former St Georges Uniting Church, St Kilda into a performing arts centre for St Michaels Grammar School (Heritage Victoria Permit P32267). In that instance, all of the original raked timber floor and pews were stripped out to allow for introduction of new tiered seating and a performance area with a flat floor. The current proposal for the former Wesleyan Church would see the internal fabric retained to a far greater degree.



Figure 20 *The former St George's Church, St Kilda, 2020 – prior to its adaptive reuse as a performing arts centre.*

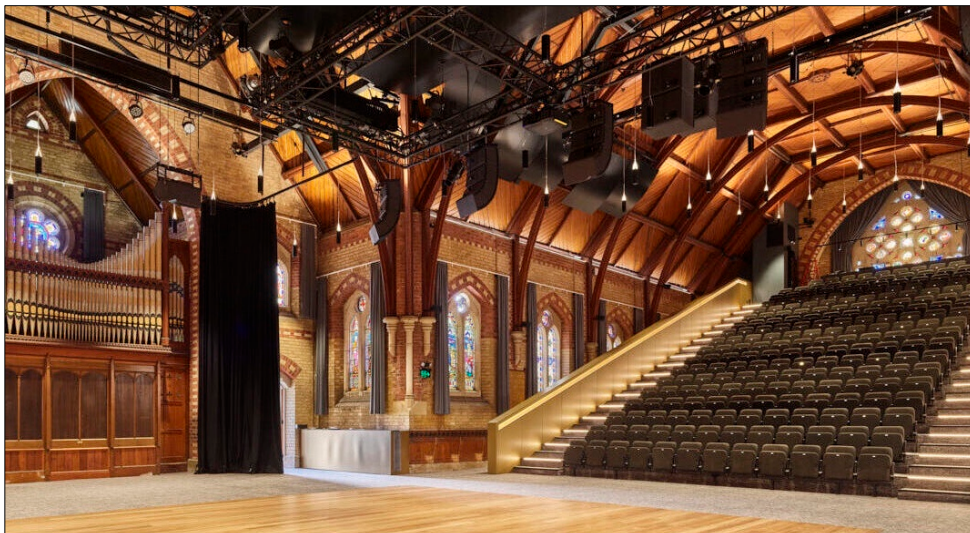


Figure 21 *Recent photograph of the church interior showing new tiered seating and audiovisual/lighting equipment. The raked floor and pews were fully removed from the nave.*

What impact (positive and/or negative) will the proposed works have on the significance of the place?

The proposal will have minimal impacts overall, particularly in terms of the external presentation of the place. The setting to Sydney Road is improved with the introduction landscaping, in place of existing visually unappealing asphalt paved surface. The use of the front setback for carparking is otherwise consistent with the longstanding practice of the former occupants of the site.

The proposed addition is modestly scale and located at the rear of the church where it will have negligible visual impact.

The creation of the new door opening in the south wall of the vestry will have no adverse impact as the wall is a plainly detailed and lacking any of the significant attributes of the original polychromatic church design.

The removal of most of the timber pews and concealment of the raked floor will bring about a noticeable change to the interior but the church's overall spatial qualities are not disturbed. Which is to say, the nave remains a single, open plan space that can readily be understood to have functioned as a church. Original stained glass windows and painted signage remain, as do the pulpit, organ and a representative collection of timber pews – all of which are clearly demonstrative of the original ecclesiastic character.

If a negative impact is proposed, why the proposed option was chosen and why other more sympathetic options were not feasible.

Retaining the original raked floor with the timber pews limits options for adaptive reuse of the church and in the present instance a commercial decision has been made to provide new office space. Leaving the floor exposed with the timber pews in-situ would render the proposal unviable, being that over half the church interior would be impractical for office use.

What measures are proposed to minimise and mitigate negative impacts?

Key measures to mitigate negative impacts are the retention of the raked floor under the new flat floor structure, so that it could be revealed at a future point, should the opportunity arise. Any floorboards that might need to be removed to allow for installation of new footings can be stored on site, under the new floor. The rear addition and gable roofed canopy to the south elevation are designed to be easily reversible with physical connection to the existing fabric limited to flashings.

Key internal items including the pulpit, altar platform/rails, stained glass, the organ and pews in the south-east corner of the church are retained to allow for the original ecclesiastical use to be clearly understood, mitigating the loss of most of the pews.

10.0 Conclusion

In summary, the proposal will not have an unacceptable impact on the significance, setting and character of the former Wesleyan Church and its component parts. The scheme allows for the church to be adaptively reused with reversible changes and minimal loss of original fabric (generally limited to the timber pews). As such the proposal strikes an appropriate balance between heritage objectives and the need to provide a viable form of adaptive reuse. Having regard for the above, the proposal has been developed with due consideration for the provisions of the *Heritage Act*.