



**Baptist Church, now Church of Christ Scientist 14
14 Fenwick Street**

History

Reputedly Baptists first met in Spring Street, Little Scotland in 1849. On the present site they erected a portable timber church in 1854 and finally this stone structure in 1868 (open 22.11.68),¹ opening services under the Rev. George Slade.² Elsewhere, the Aberdeen Street church had been built to John Young's design in 1853-4, constituting the second oldest Baptist church in the State.³ The Rev. Wilkin's *Baptists in Victoria* gives a slightly different account of events to the above, noting that a Particular Baptist Church met at the Geelong Temperance Hall from 1850, under Sanders Trotman. Wilkin wrote that the congregation's meetings were interrupted by the gold rush, reforming in a store at Little Malop Street in 1852 and soon after in the Yarra Street Baptist church under Samuel Hewlett.⁴ Nothing further is known about the Yarra Street church.⁵

Slade arrived in Geelong in 1858 as a successor of the Rev. Hewlett of the Aberdeen Street church but, as Slade's teachings were not sufficiently 'Calvinistic', he formed a breakaway group comprised of 14 church members who met as an open church in the Temperance Hall until the present stone church was built.⁶

The congregation soon felt the need for a larger church, and in 1864 the church attempted to purchase the vacant Trinity Free church (La Trobe Terrace), but was not successful. In 1866 preparations for the erection of a new church commenced, spurred on by Slade's dissatisfaction with current arrangements and the threat of his departure. The corner allotment of land was sold to the sons of Temperance Friendly Society and this aided the building funds. The church was opened in 1868.⁷

Descriptions of the opening note the old timber chapel on the site and the funds obtained from its sale and the subdivision of its site. Newspaper accounts gave the new stone chapel as 'one of the handsomest buildings of the kind in town'. It was in the Early English Gothic revival style, built of bluestone and dressed with Barrabool Hills

1 Wynd. *Churches of Geelong*

2 GEH p12

3 HPDS 297

4 Wilkin. *Baptists in Victoria* p38

5 GHRC dispute existence

6 Wilkin. *Baptists in Victoria* p49

7 *Fenwick Street Baptist Church, Geelong. Fifty Years of Service, 1857-1907, (Geelong, 1907), p.2.*

City of Geelong Urban Conservation Study
Significant Sites

sloping towards the platform. Here a 'pretty piece of work', the preacher's desk, stood. It had five inlaid Gothic panels (the work of Mr. McLachlin) and behind it, there was the Baptistry and beyond, the vestry and one other room. Melbourne architects, Smith & Watts, carried out the design (Watts in charge), Dick & Robertson the stonework, Trevena & Gubby the wood work, McEwan the slate roof and Edward Knight, the plumbing. The whole was estimated to have cost £1322, in addition to the land cost of £151/6/6 but contributions in hand had already reached £687.¹ Thomas Watts also called tenders for work on the Aberdeen Street church in the 1870s.² In 1879 a vestibule and porch were added to the building.³ When Slade left for Home Mission work at Kerang, in 1877, the first of two South Australian pastors arrived to replace him in the person of Rev E F Kingdom. The Revs. Badger, Eddy, Wainwright, Vigis, Bean and Anderton followed into the 1920s when the congregation began to dwindle with the population drift to Geelong's northern and eastern suburbs. The church was also judged as too close to Aberdeen Street so it was disbanded and the land sold in 1922. The Fenwick Memorial Church in east Geelong was its replacement in 1925⁴ while the Apostolic Church, later the Church of Christ Scientist, owned the Fenwick Street building.⁵

Description

An Early English Gothic Revival church constructed from coursed basalt, with Barabool Hills' sandstone dressings to copings, openings and buttresses. The gabled roof is slated in alternating fish-scale and bonded patterns and small gabled vents set below the ridge echo the buttress copings below.

At the rear, is a quaint brick gabled hall in the Gothic manner, attached to a castellated porch. Although linked to the church, this is done discreetly, allowing both buildings to appear free-standing.

An early view of the church shows what appears to be a tall picket fence set between stout capped posts. In that era there were also street trees (2) in front of the property. Otherwise the church is as it is today, minus the side addition.⁶

External Integrity

The fence has been removed, the yard basalt-edged and graveled, signs added and an intrusive addition placed on the south, with an associated new door formed from the former side window of the church.

Streetscape

Part of an ecclesiastical group including the Reformed Presbyterian Church (1862) and residence to the north and the St. George's Church complex on the west.

Significance

Historically, it is one of Geelong's early religious buildings and has remained generally unchanged, externally.

It has performed a quasi-public building role for over 120 years.

Architecturally, an austere stone design which reflects an architectural restraint common to the non-conformist Protestant denominations of the 19th. century, also part of an ecclesiastical group which extends south from Little Malop Street, almost to Ryrie. The hall contributes visually to the complex and possesses some unusual detailing (porch).

1 GA 24.11.68
2 INV.
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 D1939; note D1930 gives occupant as Baptist Church
6 GHRC Collection