

Bible Christian Church (former), 278 Gore St, Fitzroy, VIC, Australia

Photographs:



List: Register of the National Estate
Class: Historic
Legal Status: [Registered](#) (26/10/1999)
Place ID: 15008
Place File No: 2/11/020/0075

Statement of Significance:

The former Bible Christian Church, erected in 1859, is of historical interest for its early date and more particularly as the first Melbourne Chapel of the Bible Christian Church, a Society of Methodists which had been formed in Cornwall in 1815 and brought to Australia by Cornish miners (Criterion A.4). (Historic theme 8.6: Worshipping.)

The building, Classical in style rather than the Gothic more commonly seen in churches, is of architectural interest especially for the early use of cream brick in the arches and quoining of the side windows which have retained their Colonial Georgian pattern glazing (Criterion B.2).

Official Values: Not Available

Description:

The church is a simple, single storey bluestone structure with plastered facade, small choir gallery and round-headed windows of brick with similar reveals. The original parapet capping to the gable ends, and the window and door openings are adorned with cream coloured brickwork (this represents early use of cream brick). The church has a Classical facade (in contrast to the more common Gothic style of church buildings) and the side windows have retained their Colonial Georgian pattern glazing. The roof is slate. To the front of the church is a fence with bluestone base and early Victorian cast iron palisades.

History:

The Bible Christians were founded by William O'Bryan, a farmer who organised evangelistic work and built chapels privately in Cornwall. He had been expelled by the Wesleyan Conference and began his irregular missionary work in 1815. In October that year he formed a society of Methodists who called themselves Bible Christians. The movement, which allowed female preachers, was particularly strong in Cornwall and Devon and was brought to South Australia by the Cornish miners. From there it was introduced to Victoria where it expanded to become a separate district by 1860. The first Melbourne Chapel of the Bible Christian Church (the present building) was erected in 1859 and was used by that denomination as the Melbourne headquarters until it united with the Methodist Church in 1902. This church replaced a wooden church built in 1854 by Frederick Baker and was erected by Mr J Bray. From 1902 until 1910 the building was the Christian Tabernacle, presided over by Harry Swain, evangelist and Bible Christian trustee and from 1911-25 it was known as the Fitzroy Tabernacle of the Churches of Christ, presided over by evangelist J Whelan and others. From 1926, the building was listed as a store, owned and occupied by furniture manufacturers until the 1940s, when Matter Brothers acquired the building. The current owner is Ivo Matter and it is tenanted by D'Tello Studio, Art Libre International, which specialises in painting ceramics, sculpture, French polishing and restoration.

The original architect is unknown. A small brick vestry was added in 1869 and the street facade was finished in stucco in 1911.

Condition and Integrity:

The building with tiny brick vestry and slate roof is intact externally. Internally the old wooden staircase and choir gallery have been retained but is crowded out with stone, ceramics etc. (1985)

Apart from some graffiti remnants to the exposed side wall, the building is in good condition. The fence appears to be original. (1996)

Location:

278 Gore Street, corner Greeves Street, Fitzroy.

Bibliography:

Jacobs Lewis Vines, 1979, South Fitzroy Conservation Study.

Index to Historic Churches in Victoria.

National Trust Citation.

Lewis, Miles, (ed), 1991, Victorian Churches. National Trust of Australia (Victoria).