

<b>Heritage Overlay</b>	<b>088</b>
<b>Citation No.:</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Place:</b>	<b>Former Wesleyan Methodist Church</b>

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<b>Other Names of Place:</b>	N/A
<b>Location:</b>	66 – 76 Palmerston Street, Melton
<b>Critical Dates:</b>	1867
<b>Existing Heritage Listings:</b>	none
<b>Recommended Level of Significance:</b>	LOCAL



**Statement of Significance:**

The former Wesleyan Methodist Church at 66 – 76 Palmerston Street, Melton is significant as a moderately intact example of a Victorian Primitive Gothic Revival style and as an historical legacy of the development of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Melton in the nineteenth century.

The former Wesleyan Methodist Church at 66 – 76 Palmerston Street is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2, E.1). Although there is a recent small gable addition at one end, the Church building still demonstrates original design qualities of a Victorian Primitive Gothic Revival style. These qualities include the parapeted steeply pitched gable roof form and coursed, squared rubble bluestone wall construction. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the

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corrugated sheet metal roof cladding, pointed arched timber framed windows openings (albeit currently blocked up), and the small vertical lancet in both gable ends.

The former Wesleyan Methodist Church at 66 – 76 Palmerston Street is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It is the oldest surviving church in the Shire of Melton, and as an expression of the importance of religion in the period. It also represents the post gold-rush period of community consolidation in which many small bluestone buildings were erected in townships on Victoria's basalt plains. Its modest size and simple style probably reflect the size, beliefs, and affluence of the congregation that built it.

Overall, the former Wesleyan Methodist Church at 66 – 76 Palmerston Street is of LOCAL significance.

### **Description:**

The former Wesleyan Methodist Church at 66 – 76 Palmerston Street, Melton, is set within an open grassed and gravelled allotment, with some plantings and a mature eucalypt at the side. A modern brick Masonic Hall is situated nearby the church, to its south.

The modestly scale, single storey, coursed squared rubble bluestone, Victorian Primitive Gothic Revival styled church building is characterised by a simple, parapeted steeply pitched gable roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel (which replaced a slate roof in recent decades<sup>1</sup>). Early pointed arched timber framed windows have been blocked up with hardwood boards (one, possibly that which is now covered with a small weatherboard addition, was previously converted to a fire escape). Small early vertical lancet openings are situated in both gable ends.

The stone toothing at the south (west) end of the church suggest that provision was being made for a future extension.

To one side of the church building is a gabled addition. It has galvanised corrugated steel roof clad, modest eaves with exposed timber rafters, weatherboard wall cladding, two single door openings and a paired window opening. This store room addition obscure the original double door entrance to the church.<sup>2</sup> The form of this small addition replicates the simple gable form of the church, and its materials immediately identify it as a distinct addition to the original. The interior has been extensively renovated, there is a dropped ceiling and the walls are lined with plasterboard. Two large airconditioning units are attached to the eastern wall of the church. Externally the stonework is showing signs of deterioration with a great deal of mortar missing.

### **History:**

Before the bluestone Wesleyan church was built, the congregation had shared the wooden Melton Combined Protestant Church, which was thought to be on the north side of Sherwin Street between Pyke and Byran Streets.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that this Church was organised by 1855 and that the first minister was the Rev. Hampshire, who lived in Cambridge House on the Exford Estate. Ministers of the Protestant denominations were invited to hold services there. As there was only one resident Minister in the town (Presbyterian Mr J Lambie), laymen of the various denominations often spoke on Sundays. During the day the Church was used as a Common School, with Mr Corr, an ardent Wesleyan, the

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<sup>1</sup> National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No. B3180.

<sup>2</sup> National Trust, *op cit*.

<sup>3</sup> Pollitt JH, *An Historical Record of Melton* (Shire of Melton, nd), pp.48, 53

first headmaster. Early Wesleyan trustees of the Common School and Church were Messrs Westlake, Peast and Sort.<sup>4</sup>

A memorialist of the 1860s period, the Dane Anders Hjorth, recounted that ‘the inhabitants in Melton and neighbourhood were early imbued with religious fervour’,<sup>5</sup> while an early local historian noted that ‘the various denominations were beginning to find their strength’ in this period.<sup>6</sup> Despite a series of devastating farming seasons in the early 1860s communities around Victoria were beginning to settle and towns (many with prominent solid bluestone buildings), establish after the upheaval of the goldrush. Within a few years three bluestone churches (Weslyans, Presbyterians and the Church of England) were built in Melton, followed by the Catholic church in the 1870s.

The Wesleyan Church was the first of these churches. Its small and simple design is probably expressive of the modest size and means of its adherents, and their need for a building for auditory rather than liturgical purposes. According to Macdonald, the building cost £400, and the first service was held there on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1867, the foundation stone having been laid the previous April by Rev Dr Waugh.<sup>7</sup>

The Wesleyan church was a small but zealous group, said to have been established in Melton by Rev WL Blamires in 1862, with the assistance of numerous local adherents. One of its prominent early Melton members was John Corr, who on the advice of his friend Rev. John Draper, a pioneer of the Methodism in Melbourne Methodism, moved his family to Melton in 1860 to take up teaching at the non-vested Common School (the Combined Protestant Church on Sundays). He was also a lay preacher, and became treasurer and secretary of the new Cemetery Trust, as well as the local Registrar of births, deaths and marriages. Every Sunday he walked three miles to preach at the Wesleyan Sunday School he had established.<sup>8</sup> (There were numerous small Wesleyan churches established in the Shire at this time, with another more permanent church built at Toolern Vale.)

The building closed as a church in 1910 or 1911. One writer stated the reason as being the relocation of the church to a new building at Melton South, which was then the growth area of the town. When the United Church was formed this building served as the Melton South Infant Welfare Centre until a new Centre was built in 1975.<sup>9</sup>

The old Melton Wesleyan church was purchased by the Masonic Lodge in c.1930 and used as a Masonic Hall. In 1964 it was used as a Scout Hall, the headquarters of the First Melton (Djerriwarrh) Scout Group.<sup>10</sup>

### **Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:**

*Melton Historical Themes: ‘Community’*

*Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:*

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<sup>4</sup> Pollitt, *op cit*, pp.48-49

<sup>5</sup> Hjorth, A, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, in MDHS newsletter Feb.2001.

<sup>6</sup> Macdonald, Bob, ‘History of Melton’ (October 1969), p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald, *op cit*; also Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, c.1985), p.171.

<sup>8</sup> Thomson Zainu’din, Ailsa G, ‘The Corr Family’, in Selleck, RJW & Sullivan M, *Not So Eminent Victorians* (MUP, Melbourne, 1984), pp.150-151

<sup>9</sup> Starr, *op cit*, p.171

<sup>10</sup> National Trust, *op cit*.

Within Melton Shire are four Victorian Gothic Revival styled church buildings constructed in the nineteenth century. The former Wesleyan Methodist Church represents one of only two remaining church buildings constructed in stone in the 1860s. Christ Church (demolished), formerly on the corner of Unitt and Yuille Streets was built in 1864 and was included in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Uniting (former Presbyterian) Church also in Yuille Street, was built about the same time as the former Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1865-67, and is included in the heritage overlay of the Melton Shire Planning Scheme. The fourth Church building, St. Dominics, represents the only Catholic Church in the Shire and the only Church building constructed of brick.

None of the other nineteenth century Wesleyan churches in the Shire now survives.

**Condition:**

Fair

**Integrity:**

Moderately intact.

**Recommendations:**

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>

**Other Recommendations:**

- While the original roof is recorded as having been slate (although this is not categorically confirmed at this stage), the existing galvanised corrugated steel roof (non zincalume) is also appropriate.