

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name Methodist Church
Address 920-922 Wellington Street STRATHFIELDSAYE **Grading** 2008 Local
Building Type Church
Assessment by Context Pty Ltd



Recommended VHR No HI No PS Yes
Heritage Protection

Architectural Style Mid-Twentieth Century (1940-60) Austerity

Maker / Builder Clough

Integrity

High

History and Historical Context

History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye

The land around the former Shires of Strathfieldsaye and McIvor had a long history prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Jaara Jaara people are the original inhabitants of the area.

The area around Port Phillip was explored by Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of New South Wales, and a large party in 1836, on the homeward leg of a journey to Portland Bay. Impressed by what he perceived as the bounty of

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the land, Mitchell named the area *Australia Felix*.^[1]

The Port Phillip district was opened up for settlement soon thereafter, and much of the land in the Western districts of Victoria, including the former Shires of McIvor and Strathfieldsaye, was subsequently dominated by a series of pastoral runs. Most of the area around the town of Axedale and the numerous small towns in its vicinity was licensed to David Jennings as part of the Campaspe Plains run. The run covered an area of more than 144,900 acres and was populated with an estimated 12,000 sheep. A portion of Campaspe Plains was licensed to A. Jennings and George Playne in 1840 and the 67,000 acre station became known as Axedale. In the coming decade the holders of the license changed a number of times. By the time the leasehold over the land was cancelled in 1865, the run had greatly reduced in size.^[2]

Following the cancellation of leasehold, land holdings were of a smaller scale and pastoralists were gradually overtaken by farmers. The discovery of gold at Bendigo and the surrounding areas changed the face of the district and brought about new patterns of settlement and expansion. William John Bulling claimed to be the first man to discover gold at McIvor, and he was granted a £400 reward for the find. By 1853, over one hundred prospectors had assembled at Wild Duck Creek in the hopes of striking it rich. This number expanded the following year, and included some 2,000 Chinese immigrants.^[3]

The Strathfieldsaye Road District was proclaimed in the Government Gazette on the 12th August 1861, and encompassed within it the parishes of Axedale, Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock, Mandurang, Sedgwick and Lyell.^[4] The process of election of the board was punctuated by rivalries between Catholic and Protestant faiths, a characteristic of the district which infiltrates much of its history. Strathfieldsaye met the criterion prescribed to become a Shire in 1863, a transition that was officially proclaimed on the 17th September of that year.^[5]

In 1864, Strathfieldsaye Shire was divided into three wards; Mandurang, Strathfieldsaye and Axedale

History of Strathfieldsaye

The Shire hall at Strathfieldsaye was built in 1869 to accommodate the officers of the new Shire. Prospectors panned for gold in the nearby Sheepwash Creek at the height of the gold boom. Following the dwindling of the gold boom, many former prospectors turned to farming and agricultural pursuits. Orchards were established and flourished in the rich soils of the district, though Strathfieldsaye remained one of the smaller townships in the district. The forestry industry was also of some importance to the township of Strathfieldsaye, especially during the height of the gold rushes.

By the late 1800s, the area around Strathfieldsaye was being used extensively as vineyards, though the industry was devastated by the Phylloxera outbreak in the 1890s. The failing of the wine industry then prompted the development of many of the already established orchards in the vicinity of the town. The provision of dried fruit to prospectors had proved a valuable industry during the gold rushes, and orchardists continued to expand in the district into the twentieth century.

During recent times Strathfieldsaye has expanded in response to growing pressure for residential land, and has gradually shifted away from its previous agricultural focus.

History of Methodist Church, 920-922 Wellington Street, Strathfieldsaye

Strathfieldsaye Methodist church had its origins in the Emu Creek State School No. 228, where non denominational worship occurred from as early as 1860.^[6] The implementation of the Act of 1872 caused a shift in this relationship and worshippers using the Emu Creek school separated into two groups, with both groups considering the building of churches to ensure the survival of their respective congregations.^[7] Consequently, land was donated in the Strathfieldsaye area by locals William and Mary Somerville,^[8] with an article in February 1 1901 Spectator highlighting their strong support of the congregation:

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'Mr and Mrs Somerville had to do nearly all the work of lighting and cleaning and otherwise preparing the day school for the Sunday services. The school was then 3 miles away from their home and the long walks to and from added much to their labour of love. These difficulties finally brought them to the conclusion to build a church of their own in a more convenient place. He had two half-acre allotments in a suitable place and when talking over the project with his wife he said "What do you say Mary? Shall we give one of these allotments for the site?" "Give them both," said Mrs Somerville, "we shall be none the poorer for it".'[9]

It appears much discussion occurred within the community in regards to the proposed new site. Rev W.P Wells eventually confirmed that the new township site was to go ahead, and the first Methodist Church opening there in 1874. The church soon needed alterations to support their growing congregation, and £100 was lent by a Mr Somerville and Mr Ashley to enlarge the existing weatherboard structure.[10] This church does not survive and in 1936 Mr T. Lowndes suggested that a new church should be built on the site, and a building fund was opened eight months later.[11]

Fundraising for the new brick church included film nights, garden parties and social nights, and the fund was substantially increased by Thomas Somerville's bequest of £100.[12] It is reported that by September 1952 £3000 had been raised towards the new church, including promised donations totalling £920.[13]

The following year the contract for construction of the Church was let to Mr. Clough and rather than pay the £20 paid for a foundation stone, he paid to have the name and date of the construction of the Church set into the front wall out of his own pocket. The Strathfieldsaye Methodist was dedicated by Rev. G Shinkfield on the 8th May 1954.[14] Much of the congregation was seated on pews lent by the neighbouring Church of England at Emu Creek.

The design of the church incorporate the rear windows from the previous building, which were dedicated to William and Mary Somerville. The pulpit and choir rail were dedicated to memories of local citizens.[15] The church is currently owned by The Uniting Church in Australia and is still operational.

[1] Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote*, Shire of McIvor, p. 1.

[2] Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, p.150

[3] Spreadborough & Anderson (1983), p. 31.

[4] Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria, pp. 11 - 12.

[5] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 18.

[6] Mitchell, B, (2005) *On the creeks : Early Life at Strathfieldsaye in the valley of the three creeks, Axe, Emu and Sheepwash*, Bendigo, Victoria, p 148

[7] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 145

[8] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 145

[9] As cited in Mitchell, B. (2005), p. 145.

[10] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 151

[11] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 151

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[12] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 151

[13] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 151

[14] Mitchell, B,(2005), p 151

[15] Mitchell, B, (2005), p 151

Secondary sources

Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria

Mitchell, B, (2005), *On the creeks : Early Life at Strathfieldsaye in the valley of the three creeks, Axe, Emu and Sheepwash*, Bendigo, Victoria

Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote*, Shire of McIvor

Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale

Relevant Historical Australian Themes

8 Building community life

Description

Physical Description

The Strathfieldsaye Uniting Church is built in a rather utilitarian style in face red brick with cream brick pointed window heads. The gable end is simply inscribed with the name and date of the building. Brick piers are designed in the form of buttresses and the windows are paired between these. The roof is clad in the characteristic terra cotta tiles of the 1950s.

The interior contains some fittings and windows from the earlier 1874 church which were reinstated in the current church.

Physical Condition

Excellent

Conservation Policy

None specified.

Comparative Analysis

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The Methodist Church in Strathfieldsaye is a very late example and has no direct comparison in the study area.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Methodist Church at 920-922 Wellington Road, Strathfieldsaye built in 1954 is significant.

How is it significant?

The Methodist Church is of local social and aesthetic significance to the City of Greater Bendigo.

Why is it significant?

The Methodist Church is of aesthetic significance for the memorial windows dedicated to William and Mary Somerville, all of which were part of the 1874 church previously on the site. *Criterion E*

The Methodist Church is of social significance for the Strathfieldsaye community as a place of worship since 1874, the large site reflecting the generosity of William and Mary Somerville who donated the land on which the current church is situated. *Criterion G*

Assessment Against Criteria

HERCON CRITERIA

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion A*

Possession of uncommon rare or endangers aspects of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion B*

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion C*

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments. *Criterion D*

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics. *Criterion E*

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period. *Criterion F*

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions. *Criterion G*

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history. *Criterion H*

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Recommendations 2008

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Fences & Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted	No
Incorporated Plan	None Specified
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that the Methodist Church at 920-922 Wellington Street, Strathfieldsaye be added as an individual place to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme with the schedule entry as shown above. The extent of registration is defined by a map.