

A walk around Wesley

The image shows the interior of a church, likely Wesley Uniting Church in Perth. The focal point is a large, ornate stained glass window at the front of the sanctuary. It consists of three tall, narrow panels, each depicting a different figure, possibly saints or biblical figures, set against a background of intricate geometric patterns. Above these panels are three smaller, decorative stained glass elements. The window is flanked by two tall, green banners featuring a palm tree design. In front of the window is the altar, which is covered with a green cloth. On the altar, there is a cross on a stand and a single lit candle. The church has dark wood paneling on the walls and pews. The ceiling is high and features a large, curved architectural element. The overall atmosphere is bright and reverent.

Wesley
Uniting Church, Perth

Welcome to Wesley Church, Perth.

Wesley Church is one of the oldest church buildings in the City of Perth. It has stood in its central city location since its opening in 1870 and was the third building used by the early Methodists of Perth who worshipped and served in the name of Christ since the very beginnings of settlement. The others were built in 1834 and 1840.

Currently this building is the home of the Wesley Congregation now known as Wesley Mission Perth. Wesley is part of the Uniting Church in Australia and works in partnership with the other Uniting Churches in the City.

Wesley is a thriving congregation that values both its historic heritage and the opportunities it has to be a living expression of the Reign of God in our city. Banners in the foyer display the



current **Vision and Values of the Congregation**

and, in the entrance porch, a **Creed** developed from that Vision.

These displays are intentionally located so that the life of the people who are Wesley Mission Perth is given precedence over any historical elements of the building, as important as they are.

As you explore our church you are welcome to inspect any part of this building, be it the main body of the building or the raised area directly below the main bank of organ pipes.

A few features of the building:

Before you begin your walk around our church here are some facts about the building itself.

- The architect who designed the building was Richard Roach Jewell, church member and circuit steward, who was, at that time, Clerk of Works and Superintendent of the towns of Fremantle and Perth.
- This building, opened 10 April, 1870, is a fine example of the Gothic revival style, a popular style for many buildings, both religious and non-religious in the period 1850-1870s.
- William Buggins, the builder of Wesley Church, is honoured by a plaque in a collection on the south side of the foyer.
- The corner-stone was laid by Governor Hampton in October 1867. It is now buried under the “north” tower which was added in 1896.
- Total cost of the building was approximately £3,000.
- The original bricks bought at 26 shillings a thousand, were made from material from local clay-pits. The nave required 152,848 bricks; the chancel 18,288; the tower 187,248.
- The floor is made of jarrah.
- The church bell, originally hanging in the southern tower, used to call the members of the congregation to worship. After the 1968 earthquake it was removed from the tower; it is now in storage.
- The tower and spire, facing the William and Hay Streets intersection, were restored in 1937 and the exterior of the

church was renovated in 1987.

- Following earthquake damage in 1968 part of the spire was replaced by a copper cone. At the same time the bell which had hung in this tower since 1870, but not rung for safety reasons for many years, was removed.
- The weathercock, a hollow copper bird of handmade riveted plates, has withstood earthquake and time and sits atop the spire, its location since the erection of the church.
- From 2004 extensive work has been done to the interior of the Church in order to better accommodate the contemporary liturgical emphases. Pews have been repositioned, a platform, upon which stands the communion table, was added. The entrance to the church has been dramatically “opened up” in order to create a space, with kitchenette, for gathering after worship and at other times.

Now for your walk around Wesley

1. Start your tour in the foyer.

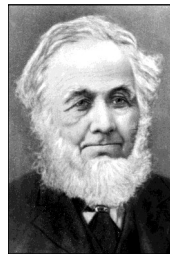
A good place to begin your walk is in the foyer looking into the main body of the building (the nave) through the glass doors. From this vantage point you can see many plaques, stained glass windows, organ pipes and other features that make Wesley an attractive and welcoming church building. By following the directions of this pamphlet you will be able to view most of the features that make this building significant, historically and in terms of the contemporary faith of its members.

At the foot of each window around the

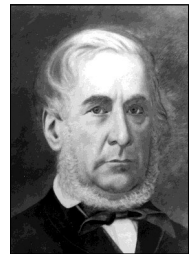
Church, and in a number of other places no longer easily accessible, you will see a stained-glass medallion displaying one of the symbols of the Christian Church. Each medallion has been presented in memory of loved ones, and a small tablet bears the names and explains the symbols. Similarly, the larger windows each have a dedication, usually as part of the window itself.

As was the pattern of their day the majority of memorials are dedicated to significant males in the history of our church. We acknowledge this historical bias and give thanks for the many, often unacknowledged, women who played important roles in the early life of our church.

If you now turn to your right and move to the north side of the foyer, you will find wall plaques commemorating various members of the **Hardey** family. **Joseph Hardey**, with his brother **John**, is acknowledged as being instrumental in the beginnings of the Methodist movement in Perth. His initiative led to the chartering of the barque



John Hardey



Joseph Hardey

Tranby, which left the port of Hull, Yorkshire, in September 1829 carrying a party of Methodists to what was then the Swan River Settlement. The Tran-

by reached Fremantle in February 1830.

Joseph Hardey, then aged 25, was a Methodist lay preacher. In June 1830, with the permission of the Governor, he conducted Perth's first Methodist service, under a jarrah tree, now marked by a commemorative plaque in the paving in the Hay Street Mall.

On the opposite, south, side of the foyer there are plaques in memory of others who were part of the Swan River Settlement from its very beginnings in 1829. One of these earlier settlers, **James Inkpen**, owned the land on which the



James Inkpen

first Methodist chapel of the colony was built, in 1834, around the corner in Murray Street. He was also one of the two men who walked to Fremantle to welcome the first minister, the Revd John Smithies, who arrived from England, with his wife and family, in 1840. Mr Inkpen was later to sell the land on the corner of Hay and William Streets to the church, for 400 pounds, for the construction of this building.

On either side of the foyer are two double inner doors with glass panels bearing the insignia of the Methodist Church of Australasia. These have been retained for historical reasons, since Wesley Church, like all other Methodist churches in the country, became part of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977.

2. When you are ready move into the main part of the building (the nave)
If you turn your attention firstly to the

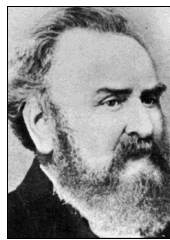
plaques on the left hand (south) side of the building you will see plaques celebrating a period in the history of this church when there was a significant Chinese membership. In 2006, as part of Wesley's celebration of the 175th anniversary of the first service of worship by Methodists in Perth, the the plaque honouring the work of the Chinese Sunday School (originally known as the Chinese Mission) was added to the collection.



Peter Yingman

This work prospered for 50 years from 1896. **Peter Yingman** was, for 25 of those years, the treasurer of the Chinese Sunday School.

As you move down this southern wall of the Church you will notice a plaque in memory of the **Revd William Lowe**. Mr Lowe was married to **Mary** the



Revd W. Lowe

daughter of Joseph and Ann Hardey. Given the times in which they lived this was a fortuitous match for Mary, given the decision of her father Joseph that his daughters would only ever be permitted to marry clerymen. Mr Lowe was the minister for Wesley Church when this building was opened in April 1870.

As you proceed down this wall towards the pulpit you will come to two full-length windows: the first representing the **Holy Trinity** and the second depicting **St George and the Dragon**. The St George window is quite traditional in its design, being created and

erected some 40 years before the Trinity window. All of the windows of Wesley reflect the times in which they were created. The most recent, the **Musicians windows** further towards the pulpit, demonstrate a more contemporary, simple and uncluttered design.

Below these windows is a portion of the wall showing decorative stencil work, behind glass. This feature once was found all around the building and over the tops of the main arch and the windows in the chancel. This decorative work was added when the settlement began to prosper in the 1890's and money was more readily available. During the 1950s this feature was painted over, being considered too colourful for the religious sensitivities of the day. One section has been restored to the original pattern.

You will, by now, be standing very close to the pulpit. You will note from the decorative work on the pulpit that it is dedicated to those who died in World War I. Originally the church did not have a pulpit. When it was decided to erect a pulpit, sometime after World



Original Central Pulpit and choir stalls

War 1, it was positioned centrally, roughly where the large communion table is now located. It was flanked on both sides by choir stalls and, immediately behind it, hidden from the view of the congregation, was the organ keyboard. This configuration was, interestingly, both a visual and practical barrier to the high altar, which has been preserved



Organ console behind central pulpit

but no longer used by the Wesley congregation. This arrangement reflected the thinking of the time, with the preaching of the word taking a central and to our way of thinking, dominant place in the liturgy. The current arrangement reflects a more contemporary understanding of the

centrality of the Lord's Supper which gathers us as a community and around which we listen for a word through scripture, preaching and the music of the choir.

3. *Walk up the steps to the raised area (the chancel).*

Wesley's organ was first constructed in 1908 by J.E. Dodd, enlarged in 1927 and rebuilt in 1992-94. It consists of 35 ranks of pipes, 2,800 in all.

The console (keyboard) is located on the opposite side of the chancel to the pipes. Its original position was in the raised alcove that now houses the organ pipes. Over the years the organ console has had a variety of locations. The combination of organ quality and fine acoustics of the building make the organ a highly appreciated part of the worship life of the congregation.



Aggie Read Wesley's first organist

The current location of the console, along with the contemporary seating for the choir and the removal of the

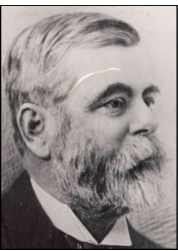
central pulpit, allows for an uncluttered view of the **Shenton** windows on the west wall. These windows were given in memory of members of the Shenton family, loyal supporters of Western



George Snr and Mrs Shenton

Australian Methodism in the early days. **George Shenton** was treasurer of the building committee that planned Wesley Church. Before the project had progressed very far, he was drowned at sea on 25th March 1867 on a voyage between Bunbury and Fremantle, aged 56 years. It was largely because of his

expressed wish that the new church was named Wesley. **George junior** took his drowned father's place as treasurer of the building committee. He went on to become the first Mayor of Perth, served as Speaker to the Legislative



Sir George Shenton

Council and was later knighted.

Coincidentally, three years before the drowning of George Shenton, his daughter Mary was drowned, at the age of 18, in the river at Guildford – a reminder of the precarious life in the early days of settlement.

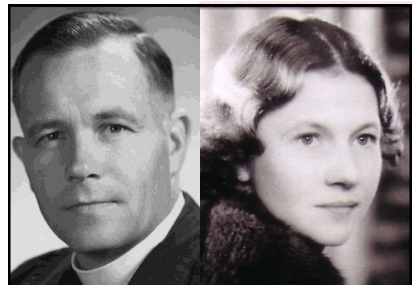
4. *Back into the nave*

When you are ready move back into the

main part of the building, the nave, this time standing in front of the lectern, located on the opposite side of the platform to the pulpit. This piece of furniture was placed in the church in time for the centenary celebrations of the Wesley church in 1970. Its front panel bears John Wesley's crest, carved in jarrah by a student of the W.A. Institute of Technology (now Curtin University).

A door beside the lectern leads into **Wesley Chapel**, constructed in 1974. The most noticeable feature of the Chapel is the round window depicting the Christ of the City – recognisably Perth, with a background of gold rays representing the New Jerusalem. Unfortunately the chapel is usually closed for security reasons. (If there is a "Friend of Wesley" on duty you may ask them if they are able to let you into the chapel to see this window. Otherwise you can view it from outside the building, albeit that does not present the best vantage point.)

Above this doorway you will notice three windows depicting scenes of the Servant Lord. These form a memorial to the **Revd Ralph Sutton**, minister of Wesley from 1952 to 1967, and his wife **Dorothy**. Mr Sutton was responsi-



Revd Ralph & Dorothy Sutton

ble for a period in the life of this church that saw much vision and innovation. In particular he will be remembered as the initiator of: Good Samaritan Industries (now recognized across the metropolitan area as “Good Sammy”) - providing employment for people with disabilities; and Rowethorpe Retirement Village (now part of the extensive Uniting Church Homes for the aged) which, in its day, set the standard for this type of accommodation.

If you now turn to face the foyer of the Church you will have a good view of the gallery, with its wrought-iron work. The gallery was added in 1896 when the church’s capacity was strained by the influx of people from the gold-

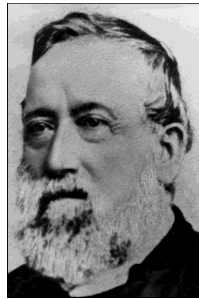


fields. Originally extending right along both walls, it was shortened during 1956 to its present proportions.

The yellow windows down each side of the building were installed sometime in the 1950s. The large window at the William Street (entrance) end of the church was also glazed with this yellow glass. When the foyer of the Church was redesigned in 2005 the yellow window was replaced with glass approximating the colour that would have been used in the original construction.

5. *Moving back down the north wall*

The first of two pictorial windows in the north wall was, like the Sutton windows, unveiled during the church’s centenary celebrations. It honours the

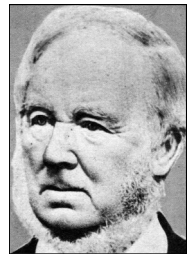


Revd John Smithies, the first ordained minister of Wesley Church, who served in Perth for 12 years. Mr Smithies arrived, with his wife Hannah and their daughter Hannah Mary who was born on route

from England to the Swan river settlement, two weeks prior to landing at Fremantle. Hannah Mary is the first name recorded in the Baptismal Register of Wesley Church.

The next window, full of the colours of earth and fire, is a memorial to **Francis Fraser Armstrong**, Government interpreter for Aborigines at the time of Smithies and, with his wife **Mary**, a devoted teacher and

helper of the Aboriginal people. The window shows Aboriginal youths being taught by tribal elders. Of great importance is the representation of an Aboriginal Christ. In the lower corner, Perth’s first Methodist chapel which was also used by Armstrong as a schoolroom, is portrayed.



Francis Armstrong

The plaques and emblematic windows continue along this wall, each one self-explanatory.

A wall plaque to the memory of Jere

miah Butterworth was donated by the Congregation and Sunday School of the Church as recognition of his generous gifts. His financial legacy continues to benefit this Church and the Synod of Western Australia.

6. *Back to the foyer*

Before you move back into the foyer pause at the glass doors and look up. You will see, above the doors, a **spear on a jarrah mounting**. This spear was presented by **Revd Sealin Garlett** on behalf of the **Nyungar people** to Wesley Church during its 175th celebrations in 2006. It was given in recognition of the way this Church has worked with indigenous inhabitants from the beginning of settlement and as a sign of reconciliation.

The history of Wesley Church is a great one. However we recognize that the original inhabitants of this land often were on the receiving end of negative and severe consequences of white settlement. All who pass under this spear are called to hear and respond to the Gospel call to live with justice and peace so that all people may know dignity and justice.

7. *Moving back into the busy city.*

When you are ready to move outside the building you will find a plaque honouring the original inhabitants of this

land and committing this congregation to continuing to pursue reconciliation. This has been placed under the “Indigenous



Revd Sealin Garlett and family

Christ” window but outside so that all who pause or gather in the area around the church can honour the Nyungar people who, from time immemorial, have cared for this land.

This plaque is probably a good place to end your walk for it does more than commemorate faithfulness of past members of this church – it points to a future when all can live together as children of God, without prejudice, violence or injustice. The congregation of Wesley Mission Perth acknowledges that we will not always get it right. However we will continue to listen for the voice of that Jewish peasant carpenter: who lived in the earliest days of the first century CE; who came to be recognized as the Christ; who still calls us to live in ways that reflect the Reign of God for all people.

